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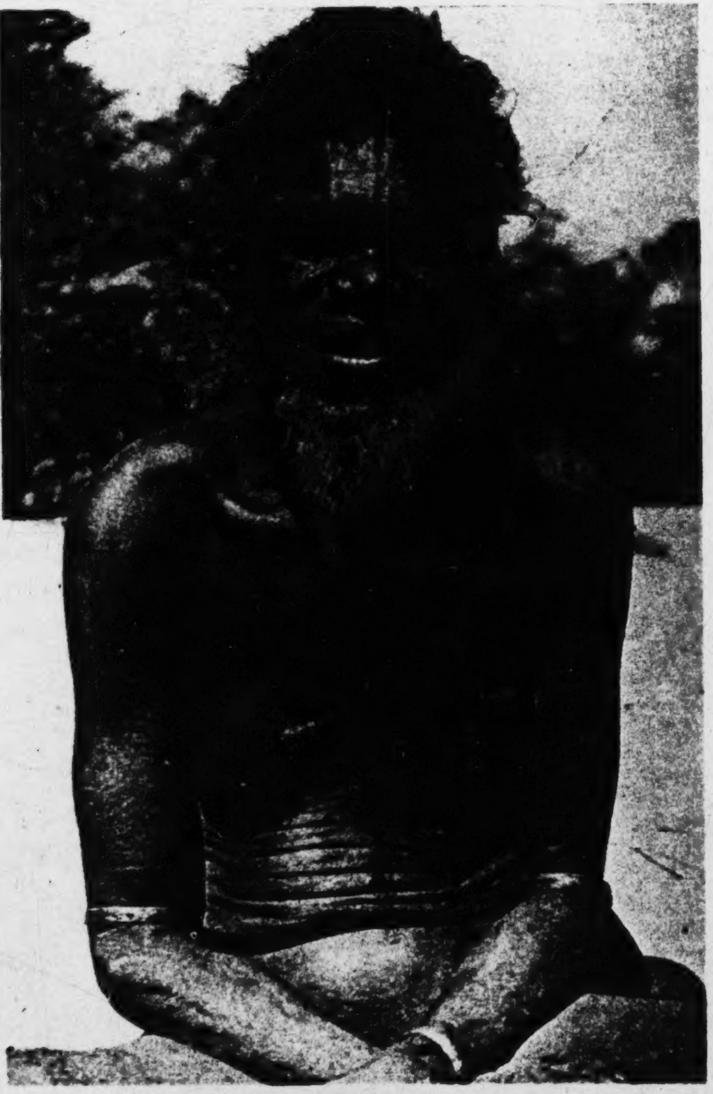

PORTRAIT OF A YULENGOR

After a prolonged vendetta, Wonggu was the last of his horde; now he is the father of fifty children

[Frontispiece- facing title page]

YULENGOR

NOMADS OF ARNHEM LAND

Wilbur S. Chaseling

[Title Page]
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Made in Great Britain
Published in 1957
Reprinted 1957

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GREAT BRITAIN BY THE CAMELOT PRESS LTD
LONDON AND SOUTHAMPTON

To my Friends

THE YULENGOR

Day Missions 4-25-58

[PV]

Preface

ARNHEM LAND! Here fish climb trees, the sun sets in green 000
fire and women hoard human skulls. It is the home of Stone
Age man who shaves his head, and dismembers and bakes a [266]
body before eating it to absorb warrior-strength. The witch- 755
doctor is supreme and treats fevers by massaging, pummelling and sucking gravel, blood, and animal bones from dumbfounded patients. Beside the backwaters of the untamed north, Stone Age nomads continue their ageless life and timeless practices.

Little is known of the Australian aboriginal except that in 174
the Stone Age he broke away or was driven out from the rest of the human race and wandered to Australia. He possessed a continent at the cost of becoming isolated from the rest of the human race. Other nomadic hunters evolved into pastoralists or agriculturists but the aboriginal was denied normal development, for neither Stone Age nomad nor modern scientist has succeeded in adapting indigenous food-
plants to everyday needs, and no Australian animal has [231]
been domesticated—as Dr Gilruth once succinctly remarked: 'You can't ride a wallaby or milk a wombat.'

Aboriginal development was not stimulated by the white 177
man and his nineteenth-century civilization. As early as 1860, the explorer McDouall Stuart built his cairn, marked his tree, and recorded: 'I am now camped in the centre of Australia; I have marked a tree and planted the British flag there. We gave three cheers for the flag, the emblem of civilization, religion, and liberty, and may it be a sign to the natives that the dawn of liberty, civilization, and Christianity is about to break on them.' But every pioneer was not a Stuart, and as Dr Madigan says: 'What did break on the

[p vi is blank]

177 Aborigines could never be mistaken for liberty, civilization,
and Christianity.' Early settlers appropriated everything of
value, and when they came into contact with aborigines
and their Stone Age beliefs and customs, they could not
appreciate their complex social organization and fanatical
regard for ancient hunting-grounds and sacred sites. Hence
the clashes and feuds of pioneering days.

Aboriginal depopulation was not entirely due to punitive
[165] measures and to introduced diseases, for Stone Age man
continued to die whenever he came into contact with modern
man. In 1820 the British Government granted ten thousand
acres at Port Macquarie as an aboriginal reserve; a mission-
[097] ary worked there for seventeen years, but by that time the
people were extinct and the reserve was abandoned. A
realistic missionary of that day wrote: 'Judging from present
appearances, by the time the missionary shall have acquired
the language so as to preach the Gospel he will have no one
to preach to.'

165 In less than a century-and-a-half the full-blood aboriginal
177 population of Australia declined to fifty thousand, and the
majority of these exist in unwanted or poverty-stricken areas
of the continent. All who have had the good fortune to see
the unspoiled remnants of this, the oldest of all living races,
are puzzled by this decrease in population, and vague
suggestions of racial suicide through crude forms of abortion
make one ask increasingly: 'Why will they not propagate?'
and 'Why do they lose the will to live?' It is a racial tragedy,
this diminishing of a people who traversed the hemispheres
before the days of the pyramids, this crumbling of a social
organization as old as gregarian man, this dissolution of a
race too old to be classified with any modern race, but so
human that any existing race could have evolved from them.

131 However, they are not all dead—yet! In isolated parts of
657 north and north-west Australia nomads roam the bush and
rugged mountains of large Reserves. Arnhem Land is the

PREFACE

greatest of the Reserves and is in the north of the Northern 131
Territory. Its northern shores are washed by the Arafura 657
Sea; on the east it is bounded by the Gulf of Carpentaria; and to the south lies the barrier of high, impenetrable, barren sand-stone mountains and deep gorges. Approximately thirty-four thousand square miles of this desolate country, with its aboriginal population of three thousand, was declared an Aboriginal Reserve in 1931. [161]

The writing of this book has entailed the collecting of 114
notes, incidents, myths, and nomads' quaint sayings, which I have jotted down on scraps of paper or on the fly-leaves of books I have had with me in the bush, in aboriginal canoes, or on luggers. In the spelling of aboriginal names and 104
phrases I have not used any system of phonetics, but have attempted to give ordinary English letter values. 'Yulengor' 101
is a general race-term applied by Stone Age men of east Arnhem Land to all nomads, in the way that we refer to them as aborigines. 'Yulengor' is not used elsewhere.

I gratefully acknowledge help given by Professor A. P. 000
Elkin who prepared the illuminating introduction. But for my wife the notes would have been offered to the public years ago, ~~and she~~ has my thanks for the wisdom of such restraint, and for encouragement and constructive criticism as I have attempted to convey to the printed page the fascinating customs, unforgettable experiences, and mind-teasing Yulengor sayings of Arnhem Land.

W. S. C.

Brisbane, 1956

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Introduction

BY PROFESSOR A. P. ELKIN

Few people had any interest in north-eastern Arnhem Land, 648 Northern Territory, until 1933. The Aborigines killed five Japanese towards the end of the preceding year, and in 1933, two white prospectors, two beachcombers, and also a member of the police party which had been sent out to arrest the murderers of the Japanese. It seems that in the first place the natives had received some provocation, which justified their subsequent actions, at least in their sight, if not in ours. In addition, they resented the intrusion of yellow and white strangers into their country, who came to satisfy their own interests, not to help the natives.

In some similar situations in other parts of Australia, punitive expeditions have been sent out, resulting in dire consequences for many innocent Aborigines, and the creation of antagonistic attitudes between white and black. Fortunately, wiser plans prevailed; indeed, public opinion, 797 648 enlightened by the determined views of Missionary and Aborigines' Protection Societies, demanded that they should prevail. It was obvious that some type of buffer should be established in the eastern part of this corner of Arnhem Land, to stand between the native on the one hand, and the occasional intruder on the other hand. The area was an Aboriginal Reserve, but it could not be patrolled in such a way as to preserve its inviolability; it is difficult, out-of-the-way country. Moreover, the best buffer would be one of a permanent nature which would reveal the white man as one desirous of serving the native, not just making use of him or his country.

The Methodist Missionary Society provided this buffer [114]

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114 by sending a missionary and his wife, who in 1934 selected 797 Yirrkala, near Cape Arnhem, as a suitable centre from [648] which understanding and friendship could radiate out into those parts of the region not influenced by Milingimbi, 150 miles to the west, and the Groote Eylandt Mission, 140 miles to the south.

This missionary was Wilbur Chaseling, the author of this book, readers of which will realize that an excellent choice was made. Mr and Mrs Chaseling did not have time to [122] take the course in Anthropology in the University of Sydney, for the need to go north was urgent; they could only attend a few times and discuss their work with myself. This book, however, and later talks which I have had with Mr Chaseling show two things: first, that he had the facility to get to know and understand his native people, their culture and manner of life, and second, that he used and applied this knowledge in working out his missionary objectives and methods. Thus, one objective which he set himself was 'to preserve native culture, to encourage the revival of old ceremonies and to preserve in the natives an appreciation of their own social organization'. At the same time, he realized that some customs (such as infanticide and 'warfare') had to be discouraged, while, along with agriculture and medicine, the Christian faith had to be presented in a way that could be understood, and understood, not as a contradiction of, and judgement on, the past, but as its fulfilment.

114 Mr Chaseling's book is a readable and simple introduction to the life and faith of a primitive food-gathering people. It provides a real insight into their minds and everyday happenings. An anthropologist might examine and discuss more theoretically (and boringly) various aspects of the social organization or ritual life, but limited as he is to a couple of visits totalling about twenty-one months, he could not provide that wealth of illustrations and incidents which the observant missionary who spends several years in the

region can note. It is for this reason that Mr Chaseling's book will be read by others besides the general reader. 114

In the rest of this Introduction, I draw attention to a few of the significant facts in the life of the north-east Arnhem Aborigines, and also to some of the important points made by Mr Chaseling. 128

Aboriginal Relationship System and Intelligence

North-east Arnhem Land is a very interesting region from the anthropological point of view. As elsewhere in Australia, the basis of social behaviour is the kinship or relationship system. According to this everyone is related to everyone else. This relationship, however, is not expressed in a multiplicity of terms which express the exact relationship between any two individuals. Instead, only about two dozen terms are used, with the result that all one's relations, that is, everyone in the region, are divided up into twenty odd groups or classes of relations. Thus, in one class the Aboriginal includes his own mother and her sisters and also a number of other women, mostly her cousins, and to all these people he applies one term, the term which includes and means 'mother'; the term 'sister' includes not only the daughters of his father's brothers and of his mother's sisters (these are sometimes referred to by students as parallel cousins), but also the daughters of certain of his parents' cousins; and so on with the other terms. This is the classificatory (or classifying) form of kinship system. It does not mean that an Aboriginal does not know his own mother, or father, or son, or father's father, and so on; he does know them—indeed, he is very good at genealogies. Its importance is that the terms used by two people of one another indicate the kind of behaviour they adopt toward each other—whether, for example, they can sit near one another, speak to one another, see or marry one another, and what is the obligation with regard to gifts and mourning with 571 601 601 602

601 respect to each other. The 'father-son' behaviour is one
602 type; the 'mother's brother-sister's son', another type; the
'wife's mother's brother-sister's daughter's husband' a very
different type; and so on.

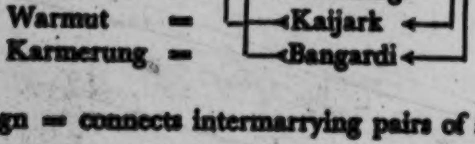
582 This system, however, is not peculiar to north-east Arnhem
Land. Nor indeed is the marriage rule. This allows marriage
with one's mother's brother's daughter, but forbids it with
one's father's sister's daughter. To emphasize the latter
[601] prohibition, a man calls his father's sister by the term for
father. This reminds him that her daughter is like a sister
to him, and therefore cannot (and will not) be thought of
as a possible wife. In other words, only one sort of first-cousin
marriage is allowed; it is the cross-cousin on his
mother's side for a male, and on her father's side for a female.
This is the preferred marriage, but, of course, such a spouse
cannot always be obtained. Then, a man marries the child
of the cross-cousin of one of his parents, or a person classified
with her—a second cousin. This marriage rule and prohibition
also operate amongst the natives near Lagrange
in western Australia.

617 Now, however, we do come to something distinctive.
Comparatively recently in the history of the region, a form
of social organization has spread there from the south-west
which is known as the subsection system. According to this,
a person's relations, that is all the people in the community,
are not only divided into about twenty kinship classes (like
[601] the mother, father, brother, sister, son, daughter, nephew,
uncle, wife's mother, mother's father, and other classes),
but in addition these classes of relations are divided into eight
named groups, each of which includes two or three types of
relations. Thus, if I am in one subsection, my children are
in another, my wife in a third, her mother in a fourth, my
mother in a fifth, second cousins whom I cannot marry in a
sixth, and so on. In most tribes, too, my son's son and my
father's father are in my own subsection, while my son and

my father both belong to another subsection; further, my mother's brother's children and my father's sister's children belong to one group, whereas the children of the cross-cousins of my parents are divided amongst two other groups. In these tribes, too, the rules prohibit marriage with one's own cross-cousins (mother's brother's daughter or father's sister's daughter), but allow marriage with the daughters of certain of the cross-cousins of one's parents. Therefore, the subsection or group which includes these possible spouses is the wife subsection, whereas the other one, the cross-cousin subsection, must be regarded differently. 617 [582]

It used to be said that the main function of this eight-subsection system was to separate one's first (cross) cousins whom one must not marry from those second cousins whom one could marry, and that the system would not make sense in a tribe which allowed marriage with mother's brother's daughter. However, the Aborigines are the best judges of that. The subsection system came to them at intertribal meetings; they considered it to be of practical value, and being also interested in its totemic and ceremonial aspects, they adopted it. In doing so they modified its principle of descent in the male line, so as to fit in with marriage with mother's brother's daughter. The result, briefly put, is that instead of a man and his son's son belonging to the same subsection, a series of four subsections is gone through before a man and his direct descendant belong to the one group—that is, a man is grouped with his son's son's son's son. 617 582 177 [611]

The actual subsection terms used in the region are: 617


Ngarit = Balang
Bulain = Buralang
Warmut = Kaijark
Karmerung = Bangardi

The sign = connects intermarrying pairs of subsections, 617 persons who in many cases are cross-cousins (mother's brother's children or father's sister's children) to one another; and the arrows connect the subsections of mother and child.

By following the table it will be seen that a Ngarit man marries a Balang woman and his son belongs to Bangardi. Likewise, Bangardi marries a Karmerung woman and has a Bulain son. So too, a Bulain man's son is Kaijark, and a Kaijark man's son is back to Ngarit. In the same way, Balang man's son is Karmerung, whose son is Buralang, whose son is Warmut, whose son is back into the Balang subsection.

616 These two male lines (or cycles) of descent are interesting for another reason. Before the north-east Arnhem Land natives adopted the subsection system, they possessed what Mr Chaseling refers to as two moieties, Dua and Yiritcha, the dual organization. This division, which is social and ceremonial in function, runs through the whole community, dividing it into two groups, membership of which is determined by descent in the male line. [611] Moreover, Dua peoples must marry Yiritcha peoples and vice versa. This means that a man and his children, his son's children, and those of his son's son and son's son's son, all belong to the same moiety, whereas the wives and husbands of these persons all belong to the other moiety.

616
617
177 Then came the eight subsection system, which the natives adjusted to their kinship grouping and marriage rules, and, with as great facility, to their moiety organization. One series or cycle of four subsections, each related to the preceding one as child to father (that is, patrilineally), was equated to one moiety, and the other series to the other. Thus, the Yiritcha moiety consists of the Ngarit-Bangardi-Bulain-Kaijark-Ngarit cycle, and the Dua moiety of the Balang-Karmerung-Buralang-Warmut-Balang cycle. The result is that when a Ngarit man, who incidentally must be

a member of the Yiritcha moiety, marries his mother's 177
brother's daughter, he is marrying a woman of the Balang 616
subsection and Dua moiety, and also of a local clan different 617
from his own, as will be shown later.

This is possibly somewhat confusing to the reader, and to all who do not possess an understanding of aboriginal social organization. But I can vouch for the fact that the system is intelligible and quite logical, and those who tend to regard the Aborigines as a low type, or of poor intelligence, must reconcile that opinion with the fact that the north-east Arnhem Land Aborigines not only understand the system, and make it work in everyday life, but that they adjusted this new grouping to their own kinship and marriage rules and to their dual organization.

I have enlarged on this matter, not only to give some idea 181
of the background of behaviour in the region, but also to suggest that in matters of importance to themselves, the Aborigines are just as intelligent and logical as we are. It is our ignorance of their world of thought which often causes us to regard them as low in the scale of intelligence, when, as a matter of fact, we are not acting very intelligently in judging them without a thorough knowledge of the facts.

The Aborigines and their Country

Here and there Mr Chaseling mentions hordes and sacred 619
wells. This introduces us to the fundamental unit of the 614
social and even 'political' organization. The tribe as an organization of clans or hordes does not really exist in this region. Instead there are a number of local groups, each occupying on the average about 360 square miles of country, loosely bound together by the fact that they possess in common certain features of social organization, for example, the kinship system, marriage rule, eight-subsection system, and the dual organization (or division of the community into two groups for certain ceremonial and social purposes);

619 they also possess rituals and myths in common, and in many
614 cases, obvious dialects of one language.

Each of these groups is a patrilineal clan, the members (apart from the wives of the men), being all related in the male line; a social group consists of a man and his brothers and sisters, his children, his son's children, his brother's children and such like. Members of such a clan must never
[582] marry one another, but only members of other clans, according to the kinship rules. This rule is called local exogamy. The members of the local clan, together with
[621]
[591] their wives who have come to live with them (as is the custom), are called a horde.

779
775
614
[778] The most important feature of the local clan is the link which binds its members to one or more sacred totemic waterholes (or wells) in the clan country. The well was formed by the cult totemic hero and ancestor of the clan. In it have sojourned from the great ancestral time the spirits of all those whose earthly course is run, that is, the souls of the dead. Also associated with the well are the clan's totemic emblems and ceremonies. One important function of the latter is the maintenance of the regular order
[789] of the dry and wet seasons, and the link with the creative epoch of the totem. Incidentally the souls of the dead may take up their abode, not only in the well, but also in the totemic emblems, and are believed to be present at the great totemic ceremonies. In addition they are called upon to do their part in some rites, especially in connexion with burial.
[764] For example, in Chapter 14, Mr Chaseling refers to a deceased child's grandfather chanting a prayer to his own dead brother (that is, the child's 'tribal' grandfather), to come and take the child back to Buralkor, the Island of the Dead. But though a deceased person's spirit goes to this island, it re-
[778] turns to the totemic well in his clan's country. This may seem contradictory to us, but just as space and time were no obstacle to the great ancestresses who came from the island,

so it is with man's spirit. Moreover, according to native 779
psychology, a man has two souls, and according to some 775
beliefs, it is a man's bush or trickster spirit which goes to the 614
Island of the Dead. But however that be, the more important [774]
of these two spirits of the dead does sojourn in the [764]
totemic well, and to make sure that the spirit arrives there, [778]
signs are made by pointing and singing to the grandfather to come for him. As one informant told Dr Warner, who studied the subject intensively, 'if we didn't sing, he might go bad because evil ghosts might catch him and take him out in the jungle country where they live. It is better that his old grandfather and his ancestors come and get him and take him straight to his clan well where his totem came from.'

Religion

Readers of Mr Chaseling's book will be impressed by the 771
important part played by religion in the life of the Aborigines. Mythology and ritual, totemism and beliefs regarding the spirit of man, the Great Creator Spirit who is revealed in the Rainbow Serpent, and the 'mother goddess', are all part of this religious life. The ritual is the prescribed acting of the great myths by fully initiated men; the mythology provides the sanction and pattern for the rites and for present-day behaviour. The emphasis on the Creator Spirit (associated
with the sky) and a kind of 'earth-mother' distinguished [171]
Arnhem Land from Central Australian mythology, though interest in the sky-world and a belief that it is the source of life-giving powers (especially through the Rainbow Serpent and the medicine-men), were widespread in Australia. Mr Chaseling's Chapter 17 shows how the natives of his region are fascinated by the sky-world and in their mythology reveal a desire to go to it.

Further details of north-east Arnhem Land myth and 114
ritual are given in W. L. Warner's *A Black Civilization.* He also discusses fully the totemism of the region. A general

114 introduction to this fundamental aspect of aboriginal life is given in A. P. Elkin's *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them.*

771 Totemism is fundamentally a complex of beliefs and
779 attitudes based on a doctrine of oneness of life shared by
nature and man. In other words, natural species and phenomena are brought into man's social order; that is, they are regarded as members of his local groups, clans, and moieties. Usually, too, a bond that is both social and religious is established between a group of men and women on the one hand and one or more natural species on the other. The latter are the totems of the former. In what is termed cult-society (or 'lodge') totemism, the totem is the symbol of the whole set of myth and ritual, which is the clan's link with, and door into, the 'eternal dream-time', the state and life of the great heroes, the ancestors, the spirits.

796 Mr Chaseling refers to many rites and beliefs which belong
to the aboriginal religious world. Those connected with
blood, described in Chapter 5, are especially interesting.
We notice the taboo on eating food, because of the shedding
[262] of blood when obtaining it, or because of the presence of a
corpse, and the rite for removing the taboo, which includes
a 'totemic well', a sacred meal, and purification by fire.
Another interesting rite is the singing of the myth of creation
by the medicine-man as a cure (Chapter 10).

842 In Chapter 8, Mr Chaseling refers to the natives' belief regarding conception. The general reader may not be aware that in most regions of the continent, the Aborigines do not regard sexual intercourse as the cause of conception. Mr Chaseling says that was the case in north-east Arnhem Land, but that now, the view has been slightly modified; it is now held that intercourse is an act of preparation for, and an invitation to, the unborn spirit to enter the womb. This agrees with the findings of Spencer and Gillen and others for nearby regions. Dr Warner, however, came to the

conclusion that in north-east Arnhem Land, the natives really 842
did know the physiological facts, but were not interested in
them; they were only interested in 'spiritual conception',
which established a person's place in the social and religious
structure of the tribe. But whatever be the degree of know-
ledge or ignorance regarding the physiological facts, there is
no doubt that the accepted spiritual doctrine is one of pre-
existence. The unborn spirits sojourn at the totemic well
waiting to be incarnated, or reincarnated; to that centre [775]
they will return after death; and without the entry of the
pre-existent spirit child into the womb, there could be no
conception.

Everyday Matters

Mr Chaseling is not concerned with discussing complex 114
social and religious problems. His aim is to help us know the
Aboriginal as he is. To this end he provides much information
regarding interesting everyday affairs. There is no smoke- [202]
signal code in this region, and message sticks are simply aids [211]
to memory. The Aborigines like having visitors and are
anxious to keep them. Like the rest of us, they are subject [181]
to flattery, and they use a highly developed form of praise
in asking for favours. The status of the women is low, but 114
some affection is shown between spouses; moreover, women 562
do exercise an important influence on affairs; for they live [593]
longer on the average than the man (they are not killed in
'wars'), and as a result accumulate a greater knowledge of [165]
the everyday myths and legends and of the clan's enemies
and friends. There are about three females to each male, [162]
another consequence of 'warfare', and connected with this
is the fact that usually a man has three wives; but there are [595]
a few cases of men with up to twelve wives.

These and many like facts are recorded in the pages which 114
follow, pages which will do much to help readers appreciate
the Aborigines of north-east Arnhem Land as human beings,

114 different from, and yet like unto, ourselves. For this reason as well as for the spirit in which it is written, I commend Mr Chaseling's book. May it be as 'bread cast upon the waters' of Arnhem Land, which after days, few or many, shall be found by the original inhabitants!

A. P. ELKIN

The University of Sydney

CHAPTER ONE

The Romance of Arnhem Land

WILD and remote Arnhem Land, in the far north of 648
Australia, has long been the subject of popular rumour. Its notorious nomads met seventeenth-century European navigators at the spear-point, and stray adventurers have been clashing with them ever since. They developed a notoriety in raiding Macassar trading-proas and later Japanese fishing-luggers (though not without provocation) for the loot that was in them. Occasional prospectors, geologists, botanists, and adventurers kept to their luggers or, when venturing ashore, went fully armed.

I first heard of Arnhem Land in 1923 when the *Douglas Mawson* disappeared off the coastline. Fantastic rumours grew out of the disappearance of the ship, and it was alleged that survivors had landed in Arnhem Land, where the men had been killed and the women appropriated by Stone Age warriors. The tale was accepted and world-wide indignation was aroused.

But living with nomads soon dispels any suggestion that 521
they have the ability to conceal news, particularly scandal. Here there are no secrets, for scheming old women persistently mutter the thoughts that are in their minds, setting the camp agog and breeding the prolific squabbles of bush life.

In 1933, clashes with Yulengor, the extermination of 648
Japanese fishing-crews, the mysterious disappearance of beachcombers, and the spearing of an investigating trooper made Australia aware of the thousands of square miles of uncontrolled continent which was peopled only by Stone

648 Age men. Very little was known of Arnhem Land and there
was a great deal of guessing. Charts were coastline sketches
plotted by Matthew Flinders in the stormy season in 1803,
when to overcome the tossing of his small boat, he ordered
his sailors to lash him high on the mast with his box of
instruments by his side. In the medley of suggestions made
for the subjugation of east Arnhem Land the Common-
997 wealth Government accepted the offer of the Methodist
Missionary Society to establish a mission station in the area,
and it was my good fortune to be accepted to commence
the new work.

121 I had a personal interest in these people, for nomads and their ways had teased my fancy from infancy. Both my mother's and father's families were among the pioneers in the Hawkesbury Valley in New South Wales, where they erected their slab huts and grew their maize. Life was hard for the pioneer, but it was also interesting, with its floods, fires, isolation, and Stone Age men. One died from spear wounds, several had hairbreadth escapes, and stories of their adventures retold among the scenes of the events made a happy background for a growing boy. In one region, a crumbling stone fire-place was all that remained of a stone-and-slab homestead where a fatal attack had been made: on another hillside a partly buried hearthstone showed where a settler's wife had defended herself from an enraged warrior with boiling water from her cooking-pots. As a child, my happiest adventures were in caves blackened by ancient camp-fires and bearing the imprint of aboriginal hands, or amongst rounded sandstone pillars in a totem-centre, or beside flat rocks and caves scored by Stone Age artists.

122
114 In May 1934 my wife and I landed in Darwin. Five hundred miles of trackless bush and the Arafura Sea lay between us and the Gulf of Carpentaria, and the only means of transport was a lugger. A lugger sounded very glamorous;

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but the *Marree*, being made ready for her three-monthly trip to mission stations in Arnhem Land, lay on a Darwin mud-flat waiting to be scraped and caulked.

A week later it seemed safe to take the boat to sea, and early in the morning we boarded the *Marree* as the jovial Baduan captain was urging his Yulengor crew to row the last of the mail and stores from the beach. Flour, rice, sugar, groceries, trade-goods, petrol, galvanized iron, cement, agricultural tools, a stove, and a medley of small items overflowed to the decks, where young fruit-trees, crates of fowls, ducks, and geese added to the confusion. There were drums of drinking-water, a heap of firewood for use on the trip, and a billy goat for the herds on isolated settlements.

A Yulengor crew dragged the anchor from the harbour 000 mud, and we were away. By late afternoon the mainland had dropped from sight and we edged our way past the shores of Melville Island. As the sun sank below the island, we boiled our billy in an open drum on deck and prepared for the night. Stars sparkled in a cloudless sky, phosphorescent waves fanned behind us as we rode the gentle swell of Van Diemen's Gulf, and life aboard a lugger seemed good—but not for long. The cockroaches saw to that; they chirped and scuttled through the cabin, chewed labels off tinned foods, ate holes in the bread and nibbled our toe-nails. Later we were told that seasoned lugger travellers slept in their boots. But with the dawn came a shout from the Yulengor crew, as they sighted beams from the Cape Don Lighthouse, and by sunrise we were wallowing in the notorious tide-rip at the Cape and feeling our way through scattered rocks to an anchorage by the jetty.

Cape Don Lighthouse overlooks many square miles of mud-flats and mangrove swamps, a wide expanse of mud and jungle sheltering a teeming life of trepang, crabs, crocodiles, flying-foxes, mud-hopping fish, and mosquitoes. Apart from the monthly visit of the supply-boat, the only

000 visitors are a few wandering nomads who barter shells and curios. It seemed a lonely and depressing outpost, but the keepers created their own interests, and one of them showed me his workshop where he cured and stuffed small turtles, working on the shell with emery and plate powder till it took on a brilliant polish of rare beauty.

It was late in the afternoon and we were forty miles east of Cape Don. A well-known missionary from Arnhem Land, the Rev. Theodor Webb of Milingimbi, was with us, and he assured us that the monotony of the low-lying coastline would be broken that night at Sandy Island. It is well named, for it is no more than a pile of sand a few feet above sea level. In their anxiety to go ashore, the Yulengor crew swam rather than wait for the dinghy, and we soon saw the reason for their impatience, as thousands of terns rose screeching from the sand where it was impossible to walk without breaking their eggs. They were about the size of domestic hens' eggs, in pastel shades of blue, green, or biscuit with small blotches of sepia, purple, brown, or grey. A few had hatched, and the fledglings ran blunderingly into the grass and sea. Our crew filled their petrol tins, boxes, and bags, and carried them to their quarters in the fo'c'sle; [262] for as far as the nomad is concerned, fresh or over-ripe tern eggs are equally appetizing, but pride of place is given to those on the point of hatching.

797 Three days out from Darwin, we dropped anchor at Goulburn Island and landed on the short sandy beach. Tall, heavily laden coconut-palms fringed this beach, and an avenue of wide-spreading mango trees led to a small grove of citrus and frangipani by the old mission house. The buildings were not pretentious, and had been built from corrugated iron and split-cane, with cement floors. Pioneer missionaries landed on the island in 1916 and hacked their way through mangrove jungle and scrub, and erected bark shelters for stores, tools, and medicines; the diarist

nonchalantly remarked that when bush-rats spoiled most of 797 the stores, they bartered fish, wallaby, and lily-seeds from nomads.

We saw white-washed aboriginal cottages built from locally burnt shell-lime, stones and ant-bed that had been standing for twenty years. Weird outlines of hands were in a number of bark huts, and an old nomad explained that when they 'go bush' they leave the mark of a hand in the house of a friend. Imprints are made by chewing moistened [201] clay and spraying it from the mouth over a hand outstretched on the bark. When the hand is removed its outline remains in the centre of the white clay.

Indifferent land had been cultivated, and in good seasons yielded tapioca, sweet-potatoes, coconuts, and bananas. [241] Nomads work in the gardens during the wet season and also collect bêche-de-mer from the mud-flats for export. Women [226] [439] weave baskets, fans, and trays from wild pandanus palm, and these are marketed for them by the mission. [285]

At Goulburn Island I met some of the young Fijians who work on all these stations. Kolinio was a giant, a carpenter by trade and the son of a chief. He introduced me to the satisfying juice of the green coconut by gashing a lip in the soft shell of a green nut and handing it to me brimming with cold, exquisitely flavoured liquid. It has been inadequately likened to cold lemonade. Fijians get on well with [177] aborigines and perhaps their colour is a link rather than a bar. They are born agriculturists, but need to unlearn a lot when they come from their fertile islands to desolate monsoonal Arnhem Land.

Milingimbi was at that time the end of the lugger trip. It is one of the many low scrub-covered islands and mud-flats known as the Crocodile Islands, yet within thirty miles of Milingimbi there is the densest Yulengor population in [161] Arnhem Land. In 1918 this mission was begun as an extension of that at Goulburn Island. The advance seems

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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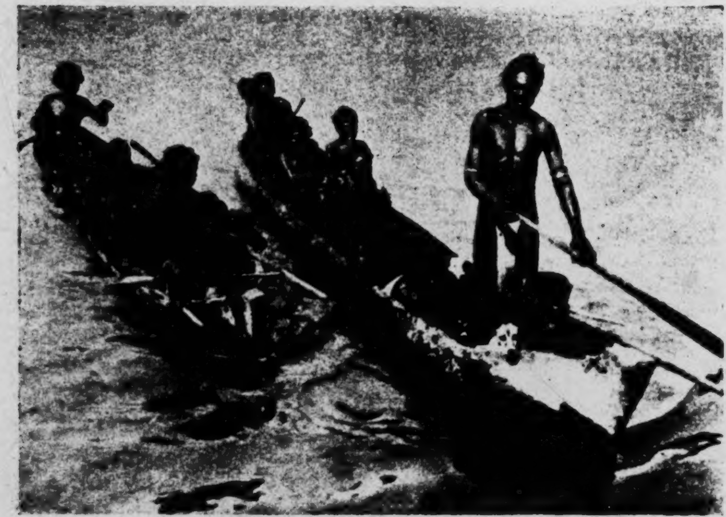

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LANDFALL

Two Yulengor families in their dug-out canoes

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ARNHEM LAND BEACH

Imported cattle near Yirrkala station

[facing p6]

797 small enough; but at that time it was a big undertaking, for the only transport was by sailing-lugger, the coastline was low, unhealthy, and mosquito-ridden, and the Yulengor had a bad reputation. Progress was painfully slow, but today the mission has its houses, workshops, sawmill, church, and aboriginal cottages built from locally-milled cypress pine. Emphasis has been laid on agriculture, and in favourable seasons large quantities of tapioca and sweet-potatoes are harvested.

[136] Milingimbi will always be remembered for its sand-flies, and they made a permanent impression on the R.A.A.F. stationed there during the war. Fine cheese-cloth nets will keep them out, but the refugee then swelters in the heat, and painful experience drives one to defeat the pest with an ordinary mosquito net and dense clouds of smoke from cypress-pine sawdust. Sisters from the mission carry buckets of this smoking sawdust to church and worship in an enveloping smoke-haze. Mosquitoes occasionally make it impossible for Yulengor to work in the gardens, and missionaries were driven from their workshops till they resorted to the pungent sawdust smoke-bucket. Each goat-herd had its own smoke-fire at night and another was lit under the fowl roost, otherwise the hens complained all night and refused to lay.

In charge at Milingimbi was Theodor Webb, a staunch and practical Christian. He was now turning his hand to one of the many jobs that fall to a missionary, the rescuing of horses bogged in a waterhole. He had been a blacksmith before entering the Church, and when he came to Arnhem Land he found plenty of scope for his muscular gifts in clearing land, and in fencing and ploughing on this isolated settlement. He was making it possible for Stone Age men to settle on the island, where he taught them to cultivate the soil, produce most of their simple requirements, and make contact with Christian ideals and modern civilization. He

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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YIRRKALA

The creek after which the station was named

[facing p7]

invited me to go with him for the horses, but warned me to 797
keep my eyes open for green tree-ants. I looked in vain for the ants till Webb pointed to a ball of leaves on the tree near my head. These were green tree-ants at close quarters.

Nests of the green tree-ant are as big as a man's head and 136
are made from leaves bound with larvae-silk. Larvae spin the silk to cover themselves, but workers divert the silk for nest-making, drawing the leaves together and weaving the living larvae-shuttle backwards and forwards till the foliage is bound with silken thread. Webb held his finger near the nest, and the warrior ants attacked; they all seemed to be soldiers, for they climbed on top of each other and fired formic acid. Months later I saw Yulengor using this acid 278
for coughs and colds, first crushing the ants, soaking them in water and sipping the mixture.

We found the horses bogged in the swamp. Webb said 000
they became bogged when rolling in the mud to coat themselves for protection against mosquitoes. I suspected a local mosquito 'yarn', but on the way home saw a dozen brumbies coming from the mud-flats, and all completely mosquito-proofed for the night.

CHAPTER TWO

Exploring

133 It has been called wildest Arnhem Land, and thousands of square miles of it have never been seen by civilized man. For months we combed its coastline, creeks, and valleys, searching for a site for the new station, but strange as it may seem, a suitable site was not discovered, although we had three hundred miles of coastline from which to choose. For that matter, I have never seen any site in Arnhem Land providing all the essentials for a self-supporting community. At least one requirement was always missing. When a rare pocket of rich jungle soil with palms, ferns, tangled vines, and tall shady trees was found, then the jungle was low-lying and useless as a building site. If an anchorage, where fresh water and building areas were ideal, then not a square foot of good soil was to be seen.

Everything of value in the country has been eroded and
washed into swamps or out to sea. That over thirty thousand
[137] square miles of it can be so desperately poor, and yet have an
annual rainfall of from forty to seventy inches, puts the land
in a class by itself. Sand-ridges, mangrove-swamps, and
laterite headlands make it a monotonous coastline. Most
swamps are impenetrable because of useless mangrove
[136] jungles, sheltering crocodiles, crabs, and flying foxes. Tree-climbing fish (*Periopthalmus*) swarm in salt-water jungles,
and at the first sight of danger hop from the water to the
roots and low branches of trees. Gravel headlands extend
inland to low hills devoid of useful timber and grass. High
mountains there are none, but in central Arnhem Land
a sandstone plateau is lacerated by countless abysmal

water-worn canyons—a wild, desolate region where only 133 goannas find enough to eat and white cockatoos screech [136] through the gorges.

Nevertheless, I found it fascinating to fly over this country —no one would toil through swamps and humid jungles if it were possible to fly over them in the coolness and comfort of a plane. Arnhem Bay is typical coastal country, low-lying and well-nigh impenetrable, but during the war years I grew accustomed to looking at it from R.A.A.F. Catalinas and watching its panorama unfold in a succession of meandering grass-choked creeks and swamps, with a narrow ribbon of jungle dividing them from the waters of the bay. White cockatoos circled over black clumps of jungle, white ibises fished in the shallow swamps, and egrets waded on the [136] mudflats and made it appear like a garden of marguerites waving in the breeze.

Even the weather is surprising, and the climate accounts 132 for the poverty of the country. Seven or eight months of the year are cool; that is when the dry, south-east monsoon blows in from the Pacific. Wind and warm sun parch the ground and bush fires rage over the hills and sandy valleys, so that for weeks the sky is hidden in smoke haze and the setting sun is a blood-red ball. Yulengor start fires when 372 hunting and cannot pass dry grass without firing it. It is a common practice for them to strip five or six feet of stringy bark from a tree, twist it into a stiff length, light one end and carry it like a walking stick, stabbing the fiery end into dry grass by the side of the track.

By October the winds are calm, humus has been licked up 134 by the fires, a burning sun completes the destruction, and the 132 country is a barren ash-heap. December brings a change in the wind and, heavily laden with moisture, it blows in from the north-west, flooding the country with torrential rain of from forty to seventy inches. Its immediate effect on dried-out Arnhem Land is devastating, as loose soil, sand, ash, and

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132 humus are swept into the swamps or out to sea. The residue from this fierce erosion is the typical clay, gravel, and stone of Arnhem Land. Nevertheless, with the first cloudbursts, the harassed country makes an astounding recovery. In an
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136 incredibly short time a thick growth of high coarse grass covers the rocky hills and sandy valleys, yams spring to life on gravel slopes, and animal and bird life is rejuvenated; red kangaroos, agile wallabies, opossums, mice, snakes, goannas, emus, jungle fowls, ducks, geese, spoonbills, herons, brolgas, and many more in kind grow fat and lazy from the
132 lavish hand of nature. But the vicious circle is not to be avoided. Winds swing back to the south-east and the nightmare of poverty again creeps over the land.

123 Exploring in the north-east brought us into contact with most of the scattered hordes so frequently referred to as the 'Killers of Arnhem Land'. In early September we were in the English Company's Islands, with the crew on the lookout for Yulengor; and when they saw a thin column of smoke on a beach, conjecture was rife as to who was in the camp. A dozen men and boys paddled out in their big dug-out canoes and came aboard somewhat diffidently. However, they were soon squatting round the hatch exchanging news with the crew, all the time passing the one
[276] and only bush pipe backwards and forwards and drawing deeply the first tobacco smoke they had tasted for months. Most of them were strong and well developed, with bushy hair, but not too clean. As a concession to the white man
[291] they had donned strips of bark on string waistbands. They were reserved, but interested in all we did, and gladly accepted a couple of tomahawks, wire for fish-spears, and fish-hooks.

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682 After the visitors had cast-off in their canoes, a crew-boy mentioned that our visitors had just returned from killing a man in revenge for the death of another in the hills behind our anchorage. It was a long story of intrigue and murder,

and on the shore after dark, the horde told me about it in 628
their own graphic fashion. Months previously, Burramai 684
had legally married a certain woman. But she had a grown- 682
up daughter and the trouble started when he also took this 'step-daughter' into his camp, knowing full well that she was not of his marriage-division and that tribally she was regarded as being as much his daughter as one of his own flesh and blood.

It was not long before this scandal of incest was known to all the hordes, and Murrkundi, a close relative of the women, came down through the islands looking for Burramai, and eventually found him by his fire near Melville Bay. Murrkundi wasted no time in taking up the argument: 'How many wives do you want? Isn't it enough that you have a legal wife from your own marriage-division? Or do you want women from other men's divisions as well?' Burramai was adamant: 'Yes, I want all the women I can get. All [183]
your talk about tabus and legal marriage is rubbish. I have had my step-daughter for many moons and no harm has come to me—I'm not dead yet.'

Murrkundi seemed to give way before this blasphemous outburst, and merely asked to be taken to see the women who were also his relatives; for in Arnhem Land, nomads are tribally related over distances of several hundred miles. When they had gone some distance Murrkundi feigned thirst, so his guide took him to a pool in a mountain stream, but he held back so that Burramai might drink first. Kneeling down to drink, Burramai saw in the clear water the reflection of Murrkundi fitting a spear to his spear-thrower with the obvious intention of killing him, so without drinking he rose quickly and wiped his lips, and said: 'That is good water. It has made me strong again. You have a drink now.'

Murrkundi drank in safety, for Burramai remembered that the water carried reflections and refrained from spearing the man. But once they were out of the stream, he told

628 Murrkundi to lead the way because he wished to go into the
684 bushes for a few moments. Unsuspectingly Murrkundi fell
682 into the trap, and as he passed by, Burramai drove a spear through his arm and another into his back. Mortally wounded, Murrkundi fell to the ground and asked: 'What is all this about? Why have you speared me?'

'You know well enough. This is of your own making. When I was drinking I saw your reflection in the water as you fitted your spear to kill me.'

'If you think I intended to spear you, you are wrong. I never pointed the spear at you, I merely hooked it to my spear-thrower and pointed it away into the bush.'

'Well, I'm not like you and I don't understand your actions. If I see anyone pointing a spear at me I kill him.'

And with that Burramai turned on his heel and walked off, thinking to himself: 'He's not dead yet, but by midday the sun will be hot and he will die.'

Months later Murrkundi's friends found his skeleton and
[764] performed the customary ghost-laying ceremonies prior to packing the bones in bark and sending them to his horde on Elcho Island.

Burramai skilfully evaded several plots to kill him for the death of Murrkundi, until eventually a big inter-tribal gathering was held in Arnhem Bay, and was preceded by
[728] the usual peace-making ceremony in which old differences are settled. Burramai was present and went through his trial-by-ordeal and made peace with the relatives of the dead Murrkundi. Normally the matter should have ended there, but an old man went to Burramai as he sat in peace with his erstwhile enemies and abruptly reopened the dispute: 'Why did you kill Murrkundi? He didn't steal your wife or abuse your totem. Why did you spear him like a dog?' Old passions were revived. One unrestrained youth said: 'Let us finish him now.' Burramai, who was exhausted from the all-day trial-by-ordeal, then made the fatal error of

running away, and two youths chased him into the jungle. 628 One of them threw a spear which cut off his ear, and a 682 second went through him. The avengers shouted to the 684 horde, and one by one the men plunged their spears into the body and left it there, exposed and deliberately mutilated.

It was after midnight when the men finished this story of 000 stark Stone Age justice, and I left them on the beach to return to the lugger to switch on a portable radio for an assurance that this was actually the twentieth century.

The rest of the trip was boisterous, with head winds and 177 heavy seas, till we entered Port Bradshaw and beached the boat for repairs. Long ago, Macassar traders fished here for trepang, and East Indian tamarind trees fringing the shoreline marked their camps. I came across a curious formation of stones, and could make nothing of it till months later I read in Matthew Flinders's diary that in 1803 he saw similar formations in Blue Mud Bay. He could not solve the riddle till he met the Macassars in the English Company's Islands, where Pobasso, their chief, told him that the Malays had made the stone fireplaces to boil and cure their bêche-de-mer.

Bêche-de-mer is known locally by its Macassar name of trepang. Scientifically it is termed *Echinodermata* or 'Spiny-skinned'; seven hundred species are known to exist, and the [136] few varieties in Australia range from nine to eighteen inches in length. They are rough skinned and look like lumps of rubber or bread rolls, with ridged bands extending around the entire length. Trepanging is the oldest industry in Australia, for it seems to have been at its height soon after Captain Cook landed at Botany Bay. Malay traders gathered it for the Chinese market. It must be cured for export, and the process is much the same as that used by the Malays. It is gutted, boiled in a strong solution of mangrove bark and sea-water, smoked over a slow fire, dried in the sun, and bagged. Chinese regard it as a delicacy and [262]

177 appreciate it, particularly during their New Year festivals,
262 but nomads will not eat the product, and their half-starved dingoes turn from it.

648 At Caledon Bay we walked over the scene of the then recent Japanese massacre. In 1933 the Asiatics came to fish for bêche-de-mer, and nomads told me that they landed near the aboriginal camp and went from one family to another offering handfuls of tobacco in return for women. Tobacco makes an almost irresistible appeal to nomads, but they surlily refused to trade, though the tobacco so tantalizingly near made them moody and irritable. Trouble was still brewing some days later, when the Japanese established their camp and employed nomads to collect firewood for the trepang fires. It is said that an Asiatic threw a piece of damper at a Yulengor for refusing to work, and thereby brought the trouble to a head; for even if they are desperately poor, nomads are extremely sensitive to a slight. Their spears were hidden in the sand, and they speared the Japanese so that only one escaped by diving into the sea and swimming to a nearby headland. Spears punctured the surface as he swam underwater, but he out-witted his pursuers by ingeniously breaking the head off a spear and clasping it under his arm as he fled into the bush. His ruse worked, and pursuing Yulengor said: 'Leave him, he has the spear through him and will soon be dead.' Days later, he arrived at Milingimbi, two hundred miles away, lacerated, exhausted and naked, and missionaries later took him to Darwin. He took the first boat to Japan.

797 No suitable site for a station could be found in Caledon Bay, so we returned to Yirrkala near Cape Arnhem. It had an exposed anchorage and poor soil, but it also had fresh [133] water, an elevated building-site and clean beaches. We decided to establish the station there.

By the middle of November, timber had been cut and brought from Milingimbi, and the first corrugated-iron shed 797 was erected. It was fifty feet long, and designed to hold stores and trade goods, as well as flour for the nomads in payment for their work in clearing and cultivating virgin bushland. My wife and I lived in one end of it for two years. With the help of Yulengor I had yarded brumbies, and broken some of them for Yirrkala; and with calves, goats, pigs, and poultry, these were shipped by lugger to the new settlement. My wife and the rest of the goods came on this second trip, and an uncomfortable voyage it was, for the sea was rough and the boat had to be beached twice for repairs. One forced landing was made on Elcho Island, and the party, having fought mosquitoes for hours, was dozing off to sleep on the beach when a Yulengor woman in the party crept over to my wife and sepulchrally whispered: 'This where two feller bin killem.'

CHAPTER THREE

Early Days and Strange Contacts

797 177 MANY small hordes came to Yirrkala within a few weeks of our arrival and set up their camps on the beach. I found I had a lot to learn from them before presuming to teach. Curiosity had lured them to the station where this white family had come with the unheard-of intention of living permanently in their country and growing food where food had never been found. Some of them had not met a white man, and seeing a white woman was a new experience for most of them.

Their habits, customs and beliefs were separated from ours by a thousand generations, and they could not understand our equipment and tools; agricultural implements, fencing wire, carpenter's and blacksmith's tools were of no greater significance to them than our small wireless set for receiving and transmitting messages to our nearest neighbours one hundred and fifty miles away. They understood that this wireless enabled us to communicate with the outside world, and as a test case Marupla asked me to 'wireless' and tell his friends to come in from Caledon Bay! A few days later there was rumour of a killing in a distant horde, and when I asked how the news had come, one man nonchalantly remarked: 'Oh, might be wireless.'

[757] Medicines were readily accepted, the most popular being a cough mixture with a liquorice and golden syrup base, which was always in demand for cuts and bruises! Patented tablets made their usual appeal, and doubtless influenced most aches and pains, at least by suggestion.

797 464 We offered the Yulengor employment in clearing the

ground and cultivating and planting crops. Payment in the 797
form of flour and tobacco was made for all work done, and 464
the principle of 'no work—no pay' was strictly adhered to. Agriculture was an economic necessity in assisting them to develop from a nomadic existence to a communal life. Pay was later in the form of food grown on the station; in this way they became self-supporting, and profits were automatically returned to them.

When the time came for planting it seemed ridiculous to 797
the nomad to bury good sweet-potatoes instead of eating 185
them, for the relationship between seed and harvest had not [241]
occurred to them. About three months later, when the first crops were still immature I was surprised one morning to find that they had been scratched out and eaten. Two months of hard clearing and three months of cultivating had gone overnight. Disappointing as it was, the people could hardly be blamed, for it was against all their experience to leave good food to mature. For centuries, stray coconuts had drifted from the East Indies to the shores of Arnhem Land, but none took root, for this unexpected harvest from the sea was eagerly seized and eaten. Nomads consume all edible food at hand, and in bush life rarely wait for yams, [261]
fruit, and berries to ripen. Food is scarce, and they instinctively make the most of anything they find. I have seen them bring loads of popular cashew nuts into camp, stripping the trees and smashing their wide shady branches in an effort to get the last of the crop, and then gorge the nuts through day and night till all have been eaten. On rare occasions a number of turtle are caught, and though some [262]
could be kept alive and eaten later, they are killed at once, and the camp feasts and sleeps intermittently till the catch is finished.

We tried to explain that cows and goats were kept for their [231]
milk and not for meat, but nomads found it hard to sit and tend them day by day and yard them at night, when each

797 beast represented a potential feast. Tailing stock, and protecting
185 them from dingoes whilst they grazed, was a foreign
231 idea to Stone Age hunters, and if they were not watched,
they would build each day a rough brushwood yard in the
bush to prevent the stock wandering off for grass and water.
Meanwhile the herdsman slept in the shade, and at sundown
he brought the animals back to the station yards.

797 With two hundred nomads on the station, a simple system
of sanitation was soon necessary. In the bush they never
[514] bother about this, for they live in small hordes, and camp in
one place only long enough to eat the meagre food supply,
and then move elsewhere. I have never seen Yulengor
deliberately wash themselves, but they are so often in the
[515] water after fish or crossing creeks and swamps, that they do
sometimes get wet. Their cleansing agents are sand and
ashes in which they sleep and lounge, and these are fairly
effective in removing body moisture and dirt. The predominating
[147] acrid odour in their hair, dillybags, and shelters
comes mostly from the blinding smoke in which they cook,
eat, and sleep.

797 Unfortunately most nomads take too readily to wearing
291 left-off clothes. We did all we could to control the craze,
177 and issued free soap and a yard of brightly coloured cloth
to the men, and short skirts to the women. Our chief
objection to the use of clothing is that it is passed from one
[296] to another, never washed, and when wet is allowed to dry
on the body, thereby causing colds and pneumonia. Bush
Yulengor wear nothing unless it be an occasional piece of
bark or bunch of leaves attached to a waist-string. But
when traders and adventurers introduced coloured cloth,
blankets, and left-off clothing, they were eagerly acquired
as ornaments, passed from one to another, worn till they fell
to pieces, and except for accidental immersion, were never
washed. Strange clothes have been seen, as when a man was
[439] seen in camp dressed in lady's floral Japanese pyjamas

bartered from a passing lugger. In church, the situation got 797
out of control when a bearded nomad came in dressed only 291
in a lady's pair of waist-to-knee pink drawers acquired in [439]
Darwin and bartered for over five hundred miles. [177]

With refreshing independence older Yulengor remained aloof from the fashion of wearing clothes. Daughters of Wonggu, the husband of twenty-odd wives and father of many children, advised him to don a covering, but he naïvely remarked: 'Why should I wear clothes? There's nothing wrong with me; I have nothing to hide.' He walks about as Nature made him, except for two strands of bush string tied round his waist. When I asked him why he wore [755]
the string, he told me it was for chronic back-ache.

It seemed only reasonable at Yirrkala to preserve Yulengor 797
culture, to encourage the revival of old ceremonies, and to stimulate in the people an appreciation of their own social organization which often has suffered from alien contact. It is unjust for any alien to come amongst primitive people for the purpose of upsetting their mode of life and converting them to living and thinking as he does; and there is no one so pathetic as a detribalized aboriginal. He is adrift from his own society and cannot fully enter into the alien social life he apes. However, it is not to be expected that all the Yulengor customs are harmless and worthy of a place in their social life; some practices lend themselves to development, but others, such as infanticide, have nothing to be said in
their favour. The birth of twins is rare, but if it occurs, the 845
mother or a relative kills one at birth or soon afterwards. 797
We were told that one of twins in a Yirrkala camp was to be 847
killed, and upon inquiry learned that superstition was the driving force behind the custom. It is true that in the bush a mother can scarcely feed herself and one child, and that if she has two infants then at least three lives are endangered; so it seems probable that infanticide was introduced in past ages because of economic necessity. But as time went on,

797 the birth of twins came to be regarded as an ill-omen to be
845 removed only by killing one of them. The establishment of a
847 station, with its agriculture and food resources, removed the
original cause of infanticide, and it became more than justifiable to discourage the practice.

797 Polygamy also can never be met by alien dictate, though
595 unfortunately it is a persistent 'red herring', and some reformers have attempted to establish monogamy within a few years. In one instance, old much-married men each brought one wife to the station and then established bush camps about half a mile away in the scrub for their other wives and children. I never deliberately suggested monogamy to Yulengor; but of course they realized that I had one wife whilst some of them had three, eight, a dozen, or even more, and they talked about the poverty of my house and discussed with me the practices of a Christian community. Apparently the matter ended there; but after four or five years amongst them, I wondered if a change was not coming too suddenly when several of the younger men
[177] told me that they intended having only one wife each. This revolutionary change can be effected, when they are ready for it and want it, without serious disruption, for men may pass over their 'promised' wives to young, unmarried brothers who stand in the same tribal relationship of 'husband' to the women.

421 Again, aborigines are reputed to be pilferers; but their outlook is so totally different from ours that they cannot be judged by our codes. In their world of nomadism they innocently pick up and use whatever takes their fancy; everything edible is there for eating, and they roam at will with all their possessions in their hands. If a nomad finds another man's canoe in a bay or creek, he feels quite at liberty to make full use of it, paddling it away for perhaps twenty miles before leaving it for the owner to recover.
[177] Into this ancient world of the nomad came the foreign

trepanger, trader, scientist, and missionary with peculiar 421
and unheard of ideas, and with theories of personal posses- 177
sions, which they decline to share, although living in an
aboriginal community based on reciprocal sharing and
exchanging, in which all are relations.

These two systems have been clashing for one hundred and
seventy years, and while some pioneers and traders have
resorted to force and compulsion, others have reasoned and
explained their attitude to property and the necessity for
respecting personal possessions. But whatever methods have
been adopted to instil in the aboriginal a new regard for private
property, he retains his ancient, instinctive, and characteris-
tic attitude of innocently using whatever takes his fancy.
A missionary once told me he had shut a youth in a tool shed 797
for continued pilfering, but that each night he climbed out 177
through the gable, spent the night in camp with his friends, 421
and was back in detention next morning, ready for breakfast
and official release. On another station the missionary
pointed to a roomy wooden hut under a shady tamarind
tree, and said that it had been put there as a warning to deter
pilfering from the gardens. Eventually, with due ceremony,
a Yulengor was locked up, but he burrowed his way out
through the sandy floor and made nocturnal visits to his
friends. By morning he was back in place with the hole filled
in, and ready for food, tobacco, and a sleep during the day.
In the following wet season he claimed the building for
himself and family and proceeded to camp in it.

Trepangers made seasonal visits to Arnhem Land, and 177
property rights were argued with spears and rifles. At the 648
first hint of trouble these fishermen sailed away, and their 421
obvious precautions were not lost on nomads, who realized
that they were feared and developed lugger-raiding pro-
pensities.

Apart from the desirability of exercising some control over 797
warlike hordes, a simple code of law and order was necessary

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A TYPICAL YULENGOR OF ARNHEM LAND

A pleasant, popular youth 'credited' with six or seven tribal killings

[facing p22]

797 on the new settlement, where ordinary and ancient nomadic law did not provide for the needs in a new and developing communal life. Nevertheless, I determined not to attempt to enforce it by approaching the Yulengor in the dual role of policeman-missionary, with a gun in one hand and a Bible in the other. The broad instructions given me were: 'Work along from day to day and do the best you can', and having thus more or less a free hand, I decided to try a thorough-going pacifism, though I must admit that I was doubtful if it would make any impression under these adverse conditions. Physical force was not used in any way as a means of control, although in several instances youths may possibly have deserved something of the sort for deliberate destructiveness. Taking a long chance, I declared the station neutral ground, and though fighting and quarrelling were not directly forbidden, those who wanted to fight were told to 'fight it out' on an old camping-ground twenty miles away. Such unheard of neutrality was altogether quixotic
[726] to notoriously warlike hordes, and maybe they were non-
[181] plussed by the novelty of it and came into the way of accepting it.

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AT YIRRKALA

Yulengor clearing land for gardens

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WET-SEASON HUT OF BARK SHEETS

The woman is making string from bark fibre

[facing p 23]

CHAPTER FOUR

Men of the Stone Age

173 TANTALIZING mystery envelops Australia's Stone Age nomads, and the enigma of their history and Stone Age habits make them the most interesting of all primitive people.

Legends in east Arnhem Land refer vaguely to mythical ancestors from 'over the sea' and 'beyond the dawn', whilst hordes in the west believe that their creator came from beyond the sunset. A precocious Yulengor explained that his people had not hitherto understood the kind of canoe used by the legendary ancestors, but, he said: 'Now we know they came in the Ark.'

174 Scanty evidence suggests that long before the days of the Pharaohs, Stone Age men paddled their canoes through the chain of islands linking Asia to Australia, probably carrying all they possessed in the way of dingoes, spears, stone axes, a smouldering fire-stick and bark bundles of food. In Arnhem Land they live still as Stone Age hunters.

141 In appearance, aborigines are well built, and slim. Contrary to popular belief they are not tall, though a casual glance over hordes here and there in east Arnhem Land might lead to this assumption. In actual fact the average height of aboriginal men is two inches less than the five feet eight inches of the average Englishman; aboriginal women average five feet one inch in height.

516 Long forearms and shins lend to the illusion of height. A man will sit with a foot drawn in and his knee bent upright

141 in front of him, and in this position his knee-cap is on a level
516 with his chin. Another habit, dependent on long shins and
as common as the white man's hands-on-hips, is to stand on one leg with the other drawn up so that its foot rests above the other knee-cap. Anyone can laboriously do the trick but only a long-shinned aboriginal would find it comfortable.

142 Corpulence is not found in Arnhem Land, for Yulengor
have little opportunity to put on weight where food is scarce, poorly balanced, and mostly roughage. Women
[462] spend most of their time hunting, and frequently travel twenty or thirty miles a day in their search for food. By
[482] carrying huge loads on their heads they acquire a unique poise and graceful carriage unknown elsewhere.

Men seem to have short necks, but this is due to chests being so well developed that they give the impression of being deliberately thrown out and upward. Back and pectoral muscles ripple the skin and the whole body tapers sharply.

Aboriginal hair is dark to black in colour, though on children's heads the tips are frequently bleached a reddish-brown. It is wavy and curly, but never fuzzy, and is fine in texture rather than coarse.

Eyes are set deep under beetling brows; pupils are smoky blue-black, and the rest of the eye is definitely not white, but rather veiled and blotched a yellow pastel shade. Finely chiselled ears lie close to the skull in both young and old; the nose, though deeply cut away between the eyes and uniformly broad, cannot be termed flat.

Aboriginal teeth are strong and well formed, and are astoundingly effective in snipping through bush rope, holding and straightening a spear in a vice-like grip, and masticating tough meat and fibrous foods. Teeth give little
[164] trouble and most of them are retained for life, even if worn down to the gums.

MEN OF THE STONE AGE

Of aboriginal feet the least said the better; for they 142
definitely give the lie to the theory that protective footwear
spoils natural shapeliness. Toes are broken, knobbed, and
widely spaced: this is particularly true of the first and second
toes, by which they easily grasp and lift spears and large
sticks or grip the rigging in climbing to the masthead of a [481]
lugger. Hands, however, are beautifully shaped, with long
tapering fingers, and compare more favourably with an
average European hand.

Finally, aboriginal skin is not black, as is popularly supposed, but is in varying shades of velvety brown, for there are blondes and brunettes in the Arnhem Land bush.

Daily life has not changed in a thousand decades, and 361
still involves hunting with stone and wooden spears and [411]
stone axes for everything the nomad eats. Their camp [224]
grounds are well known, and are usually found on sandy
slopes or beaches, reasonably close to water but as far as
possible from the swamps that usually swarm with mosquitoes and sand-flies. A typical instance is 'Damballia' or [225]
Breamer Island, favoured for turtle hunting and named after
its totemic waterhole. Having heard a lot about it, I set out 312
to see it with some boys in a canoe. I took provisions and
water for myself and flour for the boys, but they declined my
offer of a drum for water, remarking that the well on the
island would supply their needs and mine too.

With a favourable wind and tide we landed on the island
at sunrise, and whilst my billy boiled, the boys went off to
the well for water. As I was finishing my breakfast I noticed
an overpowering smell, and found that it came from the
well-water they were using to mix their damper. Even then
they steadfastly maintained that it was up to standard, and
politely declined some of mine. I found the well to be an
open waterhole, completely covered by pandanus palms in
which thousands of small doves and other birds were
roosting. Nearby were several broken-down huts, and dozens 361

361 of carapace scattered in the sand justified the island's reputation for good turtle hunting.

Camps like this have been in use for centuries, and around
several of them are hundreds of tons of shells, bones, and
refuse. One mound in the Crocodile Islands is over twenty
[172] feet high and covers an area of approximately five hundred
square yards; when an experimental cut was made into
the centre, it was found to consist entirely of shellfish
shells.

342 Camp shelters are the crudest imaginable. Prince Petr Kropotkin goes so far as to say that aborigines live in holes in the sand; and as in the case of many misrepresentations, there is some truth in his statement. When the wind is light they scoop up the sand on the windward side and sleep in the depression beside a smouldering fire, and if the wind is cold, a thick wind-break is pushed into the sand. Why should they go to more trouble when they move off the following morning?

In the rainy season nomads become uncomfortably cold
and wet and build more elaborate shelters of sticks covered
[824] with paper-bark, or of bark from the stringy-bark eucalypt,
curved inside out, so that when a number of curved sheets
are placed side by side they look like miniature tunnels.
Roomy and easily rearranged, these 'balas' suit the winds
and rain and sometimes last for the duration of the wet
season.

364 Yulengor have no knowledge of sanitation, and they are
[361] never in one camp long enough for this form of cleanliness
to be forced on them. Refuse and leaves are shovelled
on pieces of bark and thrown by the entrance. In cold
wet weather shells and food are cooked inside the shelter,
and all kinds of waste are thrown on the rapidly increasing
midden at the doorway. To camp amidst one's own filth is
not regarded as unclean. Before the middens at old camps
become overpowering or germinate an exterminating

disease, scarcity of food compels the occupants to look for 364
fresh sites.

Well-defined tracks link food-gathering areas and meander 487
in or around jungles and along swamps and creeks wherever
there is good hunting. Accompanied by a couple of aboriginal
families and a few boys, I followed one of these tracks
for about forty miles to where a distant horde had migrated.
Men went ahead with their spears, and the women followed 484
with young children, family possessions, and food-gathering
dilly-bags. Every little while there was an outbreak of
squealing from the women and yelping from the dogs, as a
bush rat or other animal was dragged from a hollow log or [224]
tree. Occasionally a woman darted off from the track and
some miles farther on rejoined the party with a bundle of [222]
edible roots or yams.

By sundown we left the bush and came out on a sandy
beach on the northern shores of Port Bradshaw, and men and
boys were soon lying on the sand waiting for the women to [462]
prepare the camps, dig in the sand for fresh water, and cook [312]
the shellfish. Once the food was ready, the women took it [264]
to their husbands, who shared it with unmarried companions.
Darkness comes quickly in the north, and married men 361
settled down with their wives and children around their 589
separate family fires, whilst the unattached males discreetly
camped some distance away. Unmarried men always
separate themselves from family groups, and any visiting
males temporarily without wives stay with the bachelors.
Not infrequently married men determine where the
bachelors' camp is to be made, and with vivid memories
of their own youthful and indiscriminate ways, rigorously
enforce this segregation. In the bush, ever-courteous nomads
reserved a place for me beside the young men's fire, but [123]
never anywhere near a family group, although the youths
have sometimes been strangers and the married families well
known to me.

YULENGOR

484 I was awakened by the trilling of a butcher bird, and as the sun tipped the motionless trees we resumed our journey through dew-laden grass. No food had been saved from the night before and sharp eyes were on the look-out for something to eat, but it was not till about ten o'clock that the women cooeed and a halt was made to cook an opossum and two goannas.

The day was uneventful and at sundown we came to a
deep crocodile-infested creek about a quarter of a mile wide.
As there were no canoes about, I wondered how the crossing
[481] was to be made, but without hesitation several youths waded
in and swam over with their spears. This is the way all the
men would have crossed, but Jirring suggested that he and
I wait with my medical equipment and camera till his wives
and children arrived with their food and family possessions.
[501] They were prepared for the crossing, and had sheets of
paper-bark which they stacked in heaps on the water,
driving digging-sticks through each stack to hold them
together. Small children and bundles of food were then
piled on top, older children clung to the sides, and a woman
swam beside each pile as she pushed it to the other side.
Medicines, camera, and swag were successfully shipped in
the same way. Such crossings, with yelping dogs, shrilling
women, and squealing children, apparently scare away
hungry crocodiles, for they seldom attack, although on this
occasion several glided off the mud into the stream as we
approached. At dusk we came to the camp of a Blue Mud
Bay horde, some distance from the river.

[092] I spent several days in this camp with Yulengor I had not
[164] seen before, and was able to treat wounds and ulcers and
give hypodermic injections for yaws and gangosa. By day
484 the men stayed under leafy bough shelters, talking, sleeping,
512 and preparing totemic emblems with intricate and artistic
462 designs. Women went food-gathering, and at sundown
arrived with loads of firewood and dilly-bags bulging with

fern-roots, yams, lizards, and shell-fish. Most of the night 484
was spent in singing and dancing. [512]

Sunrise on the fifth morning saw the camp deserted, for [462]
nomads invariably take their leave abruptly. The Blue Mud Bay horde was on its way south, and my party soon set out for Yirrkala.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jungle Lore and Etiquette

103 OUR front door overlooked an alluring crystal-clear stream
where it joined the sea. When I asked what the name of the
Yirrkala camp meant, I was told: 'Oh, that is the water
271 where the camp is made.' This beach by the sea was a
[361] favoured camping-ground and scores of Yulengor drank
from the stream. A white man drinks from a bush stream
by cupping his hands, or by blowing away the dust on the
surface and putting his lips to the water; but Yulengor flip
the water into their mouths. Out in the bush, when we
were hot and thirsty, we came to a small soak in the hills,
whereupon most of the men wandered off for strips of paper-
[415] bark or large green leaves from which they drank after
deftly twisting them into drinking cups. Scores of these
saccules lay around the soak, where they had been used at
other times.

271 Apt terms describe methods of drinking. 'Wiaktun' is
192 used of the baling of a canoe, which is accomplished by
throwing the water out in a shell or the cupped hands; and
the same word is applied to tossing water into the mouth.
'Dthurara-luptun' is a word-picture of drinking with the
lips in the stream, for 'dthurara' is a doorway, river-entrance,
or human mouth, and 'luptun' is the present tense of the
verb 'to wash'.

752 In spite of the constant use of spears and the skill necessary
262 in handling them, accidents do occur. Marjirry, a lad of
224 about sixteen, one day left the station for a day's hunting.
He stalked a kangaroo and speared it, but missed all the

vital organs, and it made off into the scrub. He followed the 752
wounded animal, and in the ensuing scuffle was himself 262
seriously wounded, and had his thigh laid open by the pro- 224
truding spearhead. However, he killed the animal and cooked some of it to take back to camp, and propped the rest in the branches of a tree. When he came limping into camp, his friends saw the blood and asked what had happened. Some of them went off to get the meat, but his closest relatives said with characteristic and genuine feeling: 'We will not eat that meat; it has Marjirry's blood on it.'
It was clearly a case of 'mumbakuta' and the spilt blood had [826]
to be ceremonially washed away and his body purified by
washing in a totemic well. Marjirry's father began the [783]
ceremony by declaring: 'No one is to eat that meat except my son's wife and children; it is mumbakuta.' He scooped a hole in the sand resembling his horde's totemic well, and when the rest of the kangaroo arrived, the closest relatives ate it, carefully buried the bones and skin in the 'well', and lit a fire over it so that the camp-dingoes could not desecrate them.

By the end of the next week Marjirry felt better, so his
father told him that he must 'wash' and that he would make [783]
him 'koota-koota', or ceremonially clean, in their totemic well. Everyone sat by the 'well' containing the buried bones and skin. After some singing and dancing, Marjirry stood
over the well whilst the leader 'sang' the horde's thanks to [776]
the spirit-Ancestors for restoring him to health. Sand was poured over him, and he washed imaginary blood off his
body and smeared himself with red ochre. However, before [783]
the affair could be considered finished with, Marjirry again went hunting and brought his first kill to his father, who announced that everyone could eat it, and in the ensuing meal thanked them for having observed the tabu. To break
this tabu and eat the victim's food, or use his utensils, is a [753]
breach of etiquette and a violation of sacred and personal

752 honour; sickness overtakes the offender, or the father may
262
224 spear him.
[753]

New spears, knives, axes, and canoes are sometimes
778 pronounced sacred and thereby impregnated by tabu.
784 Custom provides for the use of such articles in inter-tribal
411 presentations, and any responsible man may prepare them
224 and paint his horde's totem on them. Nanyan, a youth of
[431] the Gerrkee horde, spent most of his time at Yirrkala, and
[531] I watched him make a spear and 'declare' it sacred. But the tabu could not be completed till he had killed with it, and when he speared a kangaroo it automatically became tabu to all but the men of his horde. After the meat had been eaten the oldest man present completed the ceremony by painting totemic symbols on it for Nanyan. He prized his spear and used it for a time in hunting; and because it had
[531] been ceremonially 'painted', the tabu was under control, and women and children of his own horde were allowed to
[562] eat meat killed with it, though on no account could the kill be shared with females from other hordes.

Nanyan later presented his spear to a man of the Kumite
[431] horde who had no totemic or marriage link with the Gerrkee. This 'alien' appreciated the courtesy and used the spear freely in the hunt, but only the initiated men could eat the
[562] food, the women and children not being allowed to share in the kill, because their horde had no associations with the spear's totemic centre. Finally the spear was formally returned to Nanyan who put it to normal use in procuring food for himself and family.

784 On patrol I visited a horde camped among the casuarinas
226 near Caledon Bay, and in the evening saw the men return
562 with a canoe loaded with fish. During the unloading I noticed that the women and children deliberately kept away and ignored the splendid haul, and I was told that the canoe

and everything connected with it, including fish, turtle, and 784
other food carried in it, were tabu to women and children. 562
It appeared that two days previously the horde had migrated 226
from the south and had brought a skeleton in the canoe,
thereby rendering it tabu to women and children. It was
another case of mumbakuta.

Sons and sons-in-law of the deceased person brought the
fish ashore and ate them around a totemic well scooped in
the sand. The leavings were carefully buried in the 'well' [765]
and the customary fire lit over them. The camp then went
to the canoe on the beach, lit a fire on the sand, and taking
leafy branches held them in the smoke and switched them [775]
over the canoe to hunt off the ghost of the dead man. Once [783]
the skeleton's influence on the canoe was removed, it was
safe to travel in, and food could be eaten from it.

Skeletons are customarily carried in bark parcels and 784
exert far-reaching influences, and 'mali', or ghosts, accom- 775
panying such bones must be placated. In an exchange I 765
made with Yama for his father's bones (which I wanted 778
to send to the Sydney Museum), I bartered several items
for the complete skeleton in its bark cylinder with his
horde's totemic symbols painted on the outside. Unknown [531]
to me, there were two powerful influences in the bark
parcel, one in the bones and the other in the totemic symbols
on the bark itself; for such bones laid a tabu on all they
touched, just as they would have done if carried in a canoe,
and the bark cylinder, by having a totemic sign painted on
it, was sacred. Among the items I had exchanged for the
skeleton was an axe, so it was agreed that for ceremonial
purposes, this should absorb the tabu from the bones and
also from the bark cylinder. Thereafter only the nearest
relatives could touch it. To remove the skeleton tabu from
the axe, Yama cut open a tree containing a bee's nest. Be- [783]
cause of the tabu, only fully initiated men of the horde could [222]
eat it; but after the meal, the axe was painted to make it

784 safe for everyone to use. But the influence of the totem on
775 the cylinder still remained in the axe, and it could therefore
765 be used only by near relatives. To overcome this, Yama cut
778 a canoe, thereby transferring the totemic influences to it.
[222] The dug-out was 'de-ghosted' in much the same way as if it
[783] had carried the actual bones; fish caught from it were
ceremonially eaten, and it was switched with smoking twigs
to drive off the tabu.

224 'Ghostly' help is freely sought by hunters to assist them
775 in their search for food. It is generally accepted that if the
ghost, or mali, of a dead man is harnessed it will assist in the
hunt by rounding up fish, birds, or animals. A ghost dims
the eyes of the game so they cannot see clearly, blocks their
ears so they cannot hear the hunter, and plays such havoc
with their noses that he is unrecognizable.

224 To obtain the assistance of such a ghost, a hunter must
775 carry a 'maiwola' or small piece of bone, hair, skin, or
778 blood from the corpse. Small bones, hair, or other parts of a
765 body, may be had for the asking when a corpse is being
[764] dismembered in any normal burial ceremony, and these
'hunting-charms' are wrapped in bark and hung round the neck. The ghost, or mali, lurks near its skeleton and, as in the instance of a skeleton carried in a canoe, exerts influence over it and all that it touches. But when a hunter carries a piece of the body as a charm, he is able to control the ghost so that it does his bidding, and when he is hunting the ghost follows the charm. If it happens that several men have obtained charms from the same corpse, and in different parts of the country go hunting at the same time, the ghost will serve one and then hurry off to help another. This explains why charms are not always effective, for if a hunter catches nothing, that is because the ghost is otherwise engaged, or is away lurking by the main part of its skeleton,
775 which is wrapped in bark and carried by a tribal mother.

763 Any strange event can be readily explained by attributing

it to invisible wandering ghosts. They haunt old scenes 775
after death, and the signs of their whereabouts are easily 763
recognized from their mischievous habits. Burramurra was
our interpreter and spent a lot of time with us, and one day, [124]
when he went 'walk-about', a ghost hid his dinner. He had
found a nest of turtle eggs and covered them with sand [222]
whilst he went for oysters; on his return it seemed that some of the eggs had disappeared, and when he had searched in vain for Yulengor footprints he naturally concluded that some mali had been at work. Two weeks later he heard that a relative had died, and thereupon concluded that the mali of the dead relative had taken the eggs to show that he was a spirit and no longer in the flesh.

Jirring was the best-built and most attractive warrior I have ever seen. He was tall and powerful, yet he burst into my camp one night and agitatedly stammered: 'Ngarakala gurapan bureiala, bukorjulni'—in other words: 'Please give me a lantern.' When I asked him why he wanted it, he said that a mali had run over his chest and wakened him, and he was convinced that it was the ghost of his father, who was away visiting in a distant horde. I had seen his father only a few days previously, so I told him that he must have been dreaming, but he was morbidly confident that his father had been killed and that his spirit had returned with the news. Nor could Jirring be convinced otherwise, until his father returned to camp and he both saw and touched him.

On another occasion, on our way back to Yirrkala after midnight, several men and I were filing along a bush track and saw fires on a hillside. I imagined they were the smouldering remains of recent bush-fires, but no such simple explanation occurred to the nomads, who immediately lowered their voices and questioningly murmured to each other: 'Mali? Mali?' On arrival at the station we saw that something was amiss, for the whole camp was wailing and singing. We were told that a raid had been made over one

775 hundred miles away, and it was thought that two Yirrkala
763 men had been killed. The men who were with me immediately supported the tidings with the evidence of the fires in the bush, that had obviously been lit by the mali of the dead men, who had travelled the hundred miles to inform their friends.

775 Unexpected and distant smoke is at times considered to come from mali camp-fires. Without consciously contradicting the statement that mali are spirits, Yulengor complacently attribute unrecognizable footprints and other physical functions to them. An unknown canoe carried in on the tide or found on an island is accepted as having been used by mali when hunting or fishing.

562 Women have been assigned a very inferior place in aboriginal
881 society, and it almost seems that they attend some ceremonies to focus attention on the men. But at least one ceremony is carried out entirely by women, at the coming of a first menstrual period.

A young wife, on recognizing the menarche, informs her
mother, who then forbids her to leave her windbreak. Food
and water are brought to her, and most likely she will
[285] curl up in her 'nganmurra', or cone-shaped mat, till she
[302] recovers. She is painted with two bands of clay below the
shoulders, and red, yellow, and white vertical lines are made
between these bands. Whenever menstruation recurs,
262 women smear themselves with ochre and painstakingly
841 abstain from eating men's food. Dugong, turtle, fish, and
[302] birds are regarded as men's food, and men are expected to
[462] spear them; women content themselves with collecting
yams, roots, and shellfish. With undisguised chagrin, a
wife in this temporary quarantine will sit with her husband
and his wives round the camp-fire, painted red and with her
back turned, and will nibble a yam or shellfish whilst the
family consume turtle, kangaroo, or fish.

If a woman secretly hunted for men's food at such a time, 262
she would bring trouble on herself and relatives, and the 841
species of game she killed would become scarce; when the
men caught nothing they would say: 'Some woman must
have eaten food here', and within a few hours every woman
in the locality would be expected to produce an alibi. The
life of her husband would be in jeopardy and sooner or later [752]
misfortune would overtake him. In offering condolence
to an injured man, sympathizers will observe that, as there
seems to be no apparent cause for his misfortune, his wives
have probably violated this food law.

In bush camps men have a lot of time on their hands, and 574
if a man strolls into a friend's camp he can be sure of a welcome
and a remarkable display of polite consideration.
If the host has been fishing, he will share the food with
his visitor, totally ignoring women and children in his
camp. He will remark that there are more fish if his visitor
would care to stay and share them, or, if he shows signs of
leaving, the largest and best will be pressed on him and the [431]
host may even give him a spear or spear-thrower as well.
When I asked why such ostentatious gifts were made, I was
assured that it was customary, and that the man sitting
alone in his camp, except for his wives and children, is
inordinately pleased when a friend visits him, and the gifts
help to express his goodwill and friendliness.

On the other hand, aboriginal farewells are never prolonged.
At the conclusion of a visit, or when leaving the
home camp for an extended period, the men continue their [576]
discussions till the women, children, and dogs have started
out. Men then terminate their visit by nonchalantly remarking:
'I'm finished; I'm going.' Nothing more is said
on either side, and they leave.

'My word, Naratjin, you have a fine boy there. He has 576

576 your head, and his nose has a ridge like yours. I never noticed before just how much he resembles you, especially when he walks and swings his elbows. He's a splendid lad.'

Naratjin was amusing his small son beside his windbreak in the cool of the day, when Maulin, a man from another horde and moiety, spoke thus to him from the door of his hut. Nomads are extraordinarily susceptible to praise and readily respond to what we would call flattery. But
[431] Naratjin was delighted at what he had heard and set about preparing the customary present of food for the
[302] flatterer. He painted his son with coloured clay and decor-
[301] ated him with armlets and corslet of string and bird feathers, and took him to visit Maulin. Looking up and seeing the child in all his glory, the flatterer expressed his pleasure before graciously accepting the present. At first I suspected the flatterer of 'singing for his supper', but this somewhat rare form of praise is genuine; it is spontaneously given in public, and Yulengor who may be sitting near by courteously lower their voices whilst the 'toast' is proposed.

576 A carefully preserved etiquette governs the distribution of
224 food. Choice parts of the kill, such as back legs and loins, go
[888] to the old men, before the rest is divided according to the age and importance of those present. Generally the meal proceeds peacefully, and each hunter receives his share with a studied indifference which is under careful control, for the greatest importance is attached to good food.

578 Quarrels can arise from the unfair distribution of food, as
224 when Jaua brought in a kangaroo to share with his brothers
784 and an old man of the Ngaimil horde, and the Ngaimil elder quickly muttered an incantation over it, declaring that he had thereby made it sacred to his Ngaimil totem. By his act, the old man made it possible for him to eat the meat but impossible for the youth who had killed the animal to

touch it, or for his brothers to do so either. The night was 578
hideous with their quarrelling, and though the brothers 224
attacked the old man with their spear-throwers, he loudly 784
proclaimed the tabu and the youths dared not eat the
meat.

Sexual intercourse is accepted as a natural function, not 833
to be affected by proximity to the family circle or to other
families camped a few feet away, nor yet by occasional
unseemly interest from the young men's camp. Even in east 837
Arnhem Land, where a strict morality is outwardly enforced,
intercourse is little less than promiscuous, and it is not to
be wondered at that most youths laughingly admit their
affairs d'amours, and that women frequently make the
initial advance—though secretly for fear of their husbands.

To prevent irregularities, married men enforce a number 834
of prohibitions, and unmarried and unattached men are [361]
segregated in a camp by themselves at a reasonable distance [589]
from any family. A woman is not allowed to eat food [262]
presented to her husband by a youth, in case he should [431]
consider her to be under an obligation to him, and if a youth
wishes to share his food with a married brother, he must
not go to his camp but must call him over and give it to
him.

In many relationships it is unlawful for a man and [576]
woman to greet each other, and when I have asked for a
name, I have often been greeted by evasion or silence, [551]
simply because no one present was allowed to utter the name.
Brothers and sisters may not look at each other when [593]
speaking, but talk with averted faces. A man converses
freely with his wife, mother, daughter, granddaughter, and 551
niece; but when speaking to other relatives he averts his 602
face, and not being able to call them by name he draws
their attention by an ejaculation or by saying: 'I wish to

551 602 speak to the mother of so-and-so.' He may also get round the prohibition by using relationship terms or addressing his remarks to a third person.

576 195 Nomads have no equivalents to our courtesy phrases 'please' and 'thank you' but make use of a highly developed form of praise. They couch their requests in courteous flattery. A Yulengor who is preserving some highly prized spear-heads may be reluctant to part with them, but if a man says to him, 'Ga, bokor-julni' ('Give to me, your face is smiling, pleasant and good'), he will almost certainly hand over the goods. Again, a man stretching out his hand to a relative for some rare food will probably say: 'Ga, kong-julni' ('Give to me, your hand is kind and generous').

Other forms of speech are used more often between closely related nomads, as when a child says to its mother: 'Ga, bokor-ngati' ('Give to me, your face is like my grandfather's'). Brothers, sisters and cousins say to each other: 'Ga, bokor-bapa' ('Give to me, your face is like your father's'). Sometimes they employ the idiom: 'Rhumbul durung unnera' ('Body and flesh like your father'), though more frequently this is addressed to a corpse in mourning ceremonies.

For years I was at a loss to know why groups of laughing Yulengor broke off their conversation when I happened to be passing, and turned to say: 'Poor fellow-tribal-father.' When I asked why they thought I was a 'poor fellow' they were momentarily nonplussed and I was still further embarrassed. Such a group would never laugh, even at a joke, [572] if they saw an elderly or respected Yulengor passing. If they happen to be laughing or talking as an 'old' man approaches, they turn and say 'Kummajarrk', thereby conveying best wishes, goodwill, and sympathetic understanding, and implying that they think well of him and that their laughter is not at his expense. In similar circumstances, women would remark 'Kummajulni' ('Your chest is broad and your breasts well nourished'). 576 195

A man who accidentally injures another, perhaps by tripping or striking him with a spear or canoe paddle, abjectly apologizes by saying: 'Kummajarrk, ngara gorana.' He protests his goodwill, adding that he is ashamed or cast-down at his victim's discomfort, and except in the case of brothers and nearest relatives, he invariably gives a present as compensation. [431]

CHAPTER SIX

From Hand to Mouth

22 ABORIGINES have lived from hand to mouth for centuries, but it is a wonder that any human being can live in Arnhem Land and find enough to eat. Though the Reserve covers 34,000 square miles, an average white man would perish in it if he were not rescued by a Stone Age man. On the other hand an aboriginal family, isolated many miles from its hunting-grounds, can calmly grind hardwood into hunting spears and digging-sticks, make fire by twirling one stick against another, find water, erect a shelter to suit the weather conditions, and make a comfortable camp.

22 732 Iniji, an aboriginal boy of eleven years, was inadvertently abandoned on a barren island near Yirrkala when his horde divided forces and went away in their canoes. Iniji was deformed and had difficulty in hobbling, yet he kept himself alive for over a month by crawling along the beach for turtle eggs and shellfish. For moisture he manipulated [312] long grass straws far under a low cliff face and sucked the only fresh water on the island.

262 Contrary to popular belief, aboriginal foods are mainly of vegetable origin, although they also eat animals, birds, fish, and reptiles. For countless centuries, Stone Age hunters have tested roots, yams, berries, animals, birds, fish, reptiles, and shellfish, and numerous deaths have resulted from poisoning, yet they have perfected methods of treatment. [147] They have also evolved an astonishingly efficient digestive system, and also jaws and teeth that bend wire and small iron bars into spears, and nails into fish-hooks.

Most of the forty varieties of yams found in the Reserve

are either fibrous, tasteless, or poisonous, and sometimes they 262
are all three. Three or four varieties are palatable if eaten
raw, but become hard and indigestible when cooked.
Ingenious methods are used to prepare poisonous yams,
which are roasted or steamed before being shredded or [252]
pounded into a sticky dough. In one camp I saw women
going to endless bother to cook these yams, and imagined
that they must be a delicacy, but an old man said they were
called 'tchikkyugga'. 'Tchikky' (cheeky, in pidgin English)
is used for anything hostile or dangerous, and some beach-
comber had probably called this yam a cheeky ——, and
his description has remained.

'Bareela' (*Dioscorea Sativa var*) is a dangerously poisonous 262
yam resembling a light-skinned English potato, and it is 252
cooked on hot stones covered with sheets of bark and sand. It is steamed thus for an hour or more before being thrown with certain leaves into a shallow trench which is covered with bark and sand over which a fire is kept alight for between fifteen and eighteen hours. Finally the yams are removed and prepared for consumption by being pounded into a glutinous mass like gritty plasticine.

'Jittama' is also a poisonous variety and is shredded on the sharp edges of a snail shell so that the pulp can be packed into a network dilly-bag and soaked in a waterhole. The pulp ferments quickly and must be eaten in the early morning, for if it is kept in the heat or, as the Yulengor say, 'till the sun is over our heads', the children suffer from sick headaches.

In many low-lying areas, hundreds of acres of swamp are
covered with ferns, or 'karkor'. These black fibrous roots,
similar to bracken roots, are roasted, drawn through the
mouth, and chewed to extract the gluey starch. A regular
camp of a hundred or more nomads was made each year [361]
near such swamps at Cape Arnhem and they lived almost
entirely on this unappetizing fibrous root.

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262 Lagoons overflow in the wet season and hundreds of acres
[133] of low-lying land are under water. It is country where water-
lilies grow in profusion. Women dive for the root-stocks
[222] and roast great quantities of them. Lily seed-pods are eaten
[252] raw, sieved through network dilly-bags, or ground between
stones and baked into cakes.

The most palatable of all vegetable food is probably the
corm or swamp rush, 'rarkai', and these swamps are famous
[137] throughout Arnhem Land. Rarkai rushes cover brackish
[222] swamps near the coast, and women systematically turn over
many acres of black mud in their search for the nut. In east
Arnhem Land I know of several such swamps, each of which
[361] supported a hundred or even two hundred Yulengor for six
[796] weeks at a time. During the corm season the hordes make the
swamps a rendezvous for corroborees, ceremonies, and initia-
[574] tions. Corms are about the size of marbles, and in addition
to being the most nutritious of all their vegetable foods they
possess a pleasant nutty flavour.

Several foods have totemic significance and find a place
[771] in ceremonial practices. Probably the most important of
these is 'ngutu', the nut of the cycad palm, and it is said that
this yellowish brown nut was first eaten by spirit-Ancestors,
[773] who instructed their daughters in the art of preparing it.
[462] Legend declares that as the knowledge was received first by
[222] women, they have for all time to attend to the gathering
and cooking of all vegetable foods.

262 Hard-shelled cycad nuts are cracked between stones, and
252 the kernels soaked in water for three or even five days. Most
of the poison is thus leached out, and the pulp is wrapped in
bark and buried in hot sand over which a fire is lit. Cycad
meal can be baked into flat coarse cakes that sometimes
weigh up to fifteen pounds, that keep for days, and can be
carried long distances for use at ceremonial gatherings.
[574] 'Ngutu' has sustaining properties, and Yulengor live on it
for weeks as they prepare for inter-tribal corroborees.

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Old men sometimes demand a further treatment of the 262
food, and the partly cooked damper is then kneaded into a [151]
wide, thin layer and rolled into bark before being re-baked. [888]
By this final process the 'ngutu' becomes impregnated by
tabu, and only fully initiated males may eat it. I have seen [164]
men delirious in the cycad season; though not showing other
ill effects, they do not recover for several weeks. Kuninyal
suffered in this way, and I remember he was the sport of the
camp and became thin and haggard through not being able
to hunt for himself. It was openly stated that he had been [753]
eating half-cooked cycad cakes.

Many nuts, berries, and fruits are found in the bush, but
they are not very enticing. Some are as large as cherries, but
the majority are the size of currants. Wild cashew nuts,
ripening at the end of the dry season, are the most favoured
of all. Small bright red and orange cashew fruit are attached
to kidney-shaped brown nuts which are full of prussic acid.
A thick skin on the nut also contains acid, and it is roasted [252]
to extract the kernel, which tastes like a tiny potato with a
peanut flavour. In the roasting process, acid spurts from
the fire, and fumes in the smoke severely burn anyone near
by. Children develop scaly blisters, and women tending the [164]
cooking fires receive extensive burns.

'Larrani' trees, with their grey branches and large green
waxy leaves, make a gay sight when they are loaded with
bunches of ripe red fruit. The fruit looks like red apples,
but they have large woody kernels and very little flesh.
Large quantities are gathered, and hunters use them to slake [271]
their thirst; but I must confess to finding that their astringency only increased my desire for water.

Another popular fruit comes from the beautiful East Indian
tamarind tree, which thrives and bears prolifically around
old Macassar watering-places. The seed pods are filled with
a pleasant acidulous brown pulp which can be stored, but
nomads strip the trees and eat the fruit long before it is ripe.

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262 Variety in this otherwise uninteresting vegetable diet is
provided by fish, birds, reptiles, and small animals. Women
[462] fossick in jungles for land-snails and large white wood-grubs,
[226] and when the tide is out they comb the mud flats and reefs
[227] for mangrove worms, shellfish, oysters, lobsters, and crabs.

231 Some women train dingoes to help in their ceaseless search
for small animals, reptiles, birds, and eggs. A dingo pup,
captured in the bush, henceforth shares the family shelter,
travels in the canoe, and is fed and petted with the children.
They are often called 'son' by the owner and referred to by
the relationship term used for the owner or his child. When
[766] a favoured dog dies, it is buried and wept over in much the
same way as a child. Women gash their heads and wail, one
of the men conducts a mourning-song and dance, and I
have seen them switch themselves with leafy twigs to drive
off the canine ghost!

Dingoes breed freely with domesticated dogs, and most of
the wild dogs in Arnhem Land now bear unmistakable
traces of the white man's dog. However, the pure-bred dingo
is by no means extinct, and there are many of these large,
strong, good-looking brown dogs in Arnhem Land. When
they are well fed (they seldom are), they grow to almost
twice the size of a kelpie and are attractive in appearance,
but they cannot bark. It seems certain that the dingo
[174] migrated with the first aborigines, and Dr F. Wood-Jones,
an authority on the dingo, says: 'The dingo and the Stone
Age dog of Europe are practically identical and both but
little removed from the Palearctic wolf stock from which
they sprang. Man and dog were both migrants.'

773 Several Yulengor legends referred to the creation of dingoes by aboriginal Ancestors. In one story, it was said that having already formed the nuclei of several hordes, the Ancestors came to the grassy plains south of Arnhem Bay, where they made a magpie, an opossum, and two dingoes. Summer showers drove the birds into a tree, where they

made a shelter out of leaves, the opossums into a hollow tree, 773
and the dogs into long grass which they scratched into a heap and crawled beneath. And this has been the way of their kind ever since. Heavy rains later flooded the plain and approached the dogs' shelter, so one of them suggested that they leave for higher ground, but the bitch said: 'I cannot go, I am about to pup.' When the young dingoes were old enough to fend for themselves, they were sent off in pairs to Yulengor hordes, and the old ones crossed the hills to Port Bradshaw. Here the bitch suggested that they should make a canoe and sail away, but the dog took her into the hills where they and their kind have roamed ever since.

Toward the close of the dry season, swamps begin to dry 226
and the fish to retreat to deep holes. It is the fishing season, and the hunter turns fisherman. Poison is made from the pulp of a fruit, which is sprinkled over the water, till the fish rise gasping to the surface. I noticed that Yulengor distributing the pulp shaded their eyes for protection against the fumes. Another poison was introduced by spreading crushed bark which turns the water black and some hours later causes the fish to float to the surface. Simplest of all methods, however, is to drag the heads of pandanus palms through the pool to stir up the mud and so suffocate the fish.

We were camped on the edge of one of the low scrub-covered coastal plains one morning during the King tides, when there was much running and shouting in the camp, as old men, women, and children left for the swamp where shallow water-holes had been flooded overnight and now held many small fish. Everyone brought bundles of dry grass to one end of the pond and threw them into a line from one side to the other. Next the hunters entered the water and slowly pushed the grass barrier to the far end of the pond. About forty pounds of small fish were gradually forced into shallow water and thrown out on the bank, amidst shouting and splashing.

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224 I found their methods of kangaroo hunting to be the most interesting of all, and I know the men would agree with this estimate. Kangaroos are comparatively easy prey during the wet season, when long grass covers the hillsides. A hunter [302] often smears white clay over his head, for clay is an effective camouflage, and a man so daubed is scarcely distinguishable from burnt-off tree stumps with their occasional unburnt patches of white. The big hunt is carefully planned, and there are intricate methods for driving, ambushing, and trapping kangaroos when the rains are over and the herbage is dry. Wide valleys or plains are selected for the hunt, and [372] a patch is burnt out in the centre. Meanwhile, three or four men run a wide circle of fire around the burnt-out area, and hunters with spears and firesticks light many fires inside the outer wall of smoke and gradually close in toward the centre, leaving behind them a wall of roaring flames and blinding smoke which terrifies and drives all the small animals, reptiles, and kangaroos into the central death-trap where they are speared.

225 Most Arnhem Land Yulengor hunt for sea-food both on shore and from canoes. Metal has been filtering into the [177] country for two centuries, and this has made hunting easier. [411] Once they fished with pronged hardwood spears and made wooden harpoons for the soft-skinned green turtle, dugong, [325] and porpoise, but they now grind metal harpoons that are able to pierce even the hard carapace of the shell-back turtle. For turtle hunting, a harpoon is tied to bush rope and [411] fitted into the end of a long spear haft, and when a turtle is sighted on the surface the canoe is paddled quietly toward it with a man standing in the bow ready for the strike.

Dugong are hunted at night, and canoes skim around the sea-grass feeding-grounds till an animal is sighted and harpooned. The flesh resembles pork, and the animals sometimes measure up to twelve feet in length and weigh half a 136 ton. A dugong suckles her calf while clasping it to her with one flipper and swimming with the other. It is said that ancient mariners, seeing dugong for the first time, framed the original story of the mermaid. 136

Methods of cooking meat and fish are simple, though not very thorough. Snakes are coiled and cooked in the ashes, and small animals, birds, flying foxes, grubs, and snails are roasted in the coals. Turtles, dugong, porpoise, and kangaroo are sometimes jointed and packed on hot stones; sheets of paper bark and sand are piled on top, and a small hole is left at the apex of the mound for appetizing steam to escape. However, hungry hunters often will not wait for women to go to all this bother, and they slice the meat and eat it after holding it near the hot ashes till the surface is slightly singed. 252

CHAPTER SEVEN

Languages, Signs, and Smoke-Signals

197 POPULAR opinion has it that all aborigines speak one lan-
guage, and I have often been asked if I can 'speak aboriginal'.
Actually, there are scores of different tribal languages
throughout Australia, and within these there are hundreds
of horde-dialects. In the 34,000 square miles of Arnhem
Land there are five distinct languages, one for each of the
[621] five groups of hordes, and as there are between a dozen and
forty hordes in each horde-group, there are well over a
hundred dialects in this small part of Australia.

[114] In the group that I knew best, which extended from Cape
[621] Stewart to Blue Mud Bay, there were thirty-five hordes,
each speaking its own dialect. If you had mastered one of
them, Yulengor a few miles away probably could not have
understood you. I found that when members of these
191 widely separated hordes met, they could not make themselves
197 understood in their own dialects, but experimented on
several till they found one familiar to both parties.

Stone Age men are born linguists, and not only is their
speech grammatically correct, but youths amuse themselves
by conversing in some little-known dialect. Old Wonggu
[522] occasionally introduced a Macassar sentence into ordinary
conversation so as to puzzle me, and he would enjoy his joke
in using this dialect learnt fifty years previously from East
Indian traders. English words and phrases, as well as
pidgin English, have occasionally been picked up from
traders and beachcombers.

127 Since it should be easier for one white man to learn an
191

aboriginal dialect than for several hundred nomads to 122
learn English, I arranged with two youths to teach me. 191
But until I constantly practised the local dialect on them I found that they were learning English much faster than I was learning their tongue. In their anxiety to learn English, they said that it would be quicker for me to teach them than for me to bother to learn aboriginal; moreover, I would eventually go back to my own people, and they would then have to start all over again and teach my successor.

If good English is spoken to the aboriginal he learns it 198
with an ability and speed that makes the use of pidgin 191
English absurd. No one knows where pidgin English originated, but the term 'pidgin' is thought to be a Chinese corruption of the word 'business'. Through the years there has been a local fungus-development of an Australian pidgin-jargon, in which occur such travesties of speech as 'blackfellow', 'gin', 'lubra', 'thinkin', 'savvy', 'sitdown', 'alonga', and 'gammon'; and these in turn have been reinforced by still more hybrid phrases and transplanted by traders throughout the South Pacific.

At Goulburn Island where a school had been established [871]
for twenty years, a Government doctor was making an inspection and singled out an old woman for further attention. Turning to her son, the doctor loosed a flood of pidgin which I failed to follow, but I gathered that he wanted to know how long her fingers had been doubled up. The heavy silence was broken by the boy saying, in perfectly modulated English: 'I beg your pardon, doctor?' Fortunately the medico had a sense of humour and his laughter cleared the way for a successful inquiry in English. Recently a naval patrol vessel anchored off Goulburn Island, and an officer questioned a youth in pidgin. The boy said in surprise: 'Excuse me, sir, are you a "new Australian"?'

In writing the dialect, I found that several English con- 104
sonants were not needed and the ordinary alphabet had to be

104 rearranged. Consonants also could be revalued to provide for the common 'ng' and 'ny' at the beginning of many words, and for the frequent 'tch' we used 'tj'. Vagaries of
192 pronunciation occurred in unwritten and slurred words, such as 'nama' and 'ngama' (the verbs 'to see' and 'to hear'). For years I was confused by the almost indistinguishable differences (all vowels being short) between the verb 'ngurra' (I lie down), the noun 'ngurru' (a nose), the adjectival suffix 'nguru' (from), and the noun 'ngurra' (a 'fire'). 'Jukor' is a louse whilst any sort of fat is 'jukorr'. There seems to be no connexion between the terms, except
[262] that the fat of any fish or game is considered a rare and
[515] tasty morsel, the sight of it exciting children as much as would a tin of lollies, and head-lice are small fat parasites which women and children gather from each other's heads and eat with obvious relish.

193 It has been said that aboriginal languages have a common root-stock, and that some features are common to them all.
[197] The indefinite article in language is missing in Arnhem Land, as it is elsewhere, but 'ka' is used in the north as the equivalent of the English conjunction 'and'. With one or two exceptions aboriginal adjectives follow the noun, not only in the north but throughout Australia. Some forms of the pronoun 'ngara' (I) or 'ngaraku' ('my' or 'mine') are found in all dialects from Cape York to Cape Leeuwin. In addition to singular and plural pronouns, there are also first, second, and third duals: 'I', 'you', and 'he' are there; 'ngali' refers to the two of us when both are present; 'nyilinyu' indicates two persons, of whom one is absent—for example, if a man said to me 'Who made that canoe?' and it belonged to an absent friend and me, I should reply 'nyilinyu' (the two of us 'made it'). 'Numa' is the form of 'you two' and 'munda' refers to 'those two'.

The language runs to inclusive and exclusive plurals in which 'napuru' refers exclusively to those of us in the

vicinity of the speaker and 'limeru' includes everybody, far 193
and wide, such as the human race.

Stone Age men have little use for numbers, for they have 802
so little to count. If a definite number is used at all, it is usually under five. Fingers are the theoretical basis for counting, and one is 'wonggain'; two 'marrama'; three is two plus one; four is two and two; five is known as a hand, 'korng'. Six is hand plus one, and so on to ten, which is two hands, 'korng-marrama'. When pidgin is in use, the [198]
numerals are one to five, and after that it is 'big mob'.

Aboriginal languages are 'alive' and are being altered to 197
meet new needs and conditions. Many new words have 192
been absorbed as a result of the Macassars trading here, and so complete has been the acceptance and use of these terms, that the oldest nomads, some of whom travelled to Macassar [177]
on the trading proas, do not readily recognize their origin. With the advent of white traders, the Yulengor began to assimilate English words, and at Yirrkala I found a boy called Deamer (steamer) and a girl Giggerat (cigarette). [551]
Soap is 'jope', scissors are 'thither', razor is 'yeezer', cockroach 'karkrartj', and from one end of the country to the other, flying fox has been corrupted to 'bailanbok'. A nomad can do no other than reckon the hours of the day by the sun, [805]
and as a consequence, clocks and watches are also known as sun, 'wolu'.

'Dimit-dimirr' is the word for barbed fronds on the pandanus palm, as well as for thorny trees and spiky anemones, but now it is given to introduced lemon trees and barbed wire. 'To swim' is 'waitun' and to this they add the suffix 'mirry', something like our suffix 'ful', meaning 'full of', and the resultant 'waitunamirry' becomes a boat's propellor. 'Kurrta', denoting fire, firewood, or smoke, now serves for an engine, and 'kurrtamirry', full of fire, is a shotgun or rifle. Any law is 'rorm', and the verb 'to give' is 'gurrpan', so that to teach something is 'rormgurrpan', 192 and a school-teacher becomes 'rorm-gurrpan-a-mirry'.

[197] Aboriginal dialects are picturesque, and the same terms
are used for objects possessing some similarity; thus, twenty
or more names for parts of the body are used for trees and
geographical formations. A backbone is the same as a
mountain chain; the nose on men, animals, and fish is the
same as a peninsular, a cape, or the bow of a boat or canoe;
arms, wings, limbs of trees, and tributary streams are all
called 'werrna'. A main river stream is called throat.
Wounds and sores are classed with holes in utensils, canoes,
huts, or clothing.

When human conditions resemble natural phenomena,
this process is reversed, and the adjective blunt, 'dumuk', is
used for a bush track through thick scrub; a man, too, may be
'blunt' or dull of hearing or intellect and understanding; the
word is also in everyday use to describe a blunt axe or knife.
Hollow logs or burial posts are 'dupun', and in a mild form
[578] of abuse a nomad may be called 'dupun' or empty-headed.

103 Scores of appropriate place-names occur throughout the
country, but it is not surprising that there are also hundreds
of other euphonious names having no particular significance,
for along the coast and on the countless bush tracks, every
waterhole, swamp, hill, river crossing, and ancient camp
site has a name. 'Rungi' could be a falling tide, low tide, or
an exposed beach, and there are many coastal names linked
with rungi. West Arnhem Land is known for its low lying
[133] swamps and mudflats, but in the north-east there is a startling
change to clean, sandy beaches with bold headlands, and
the latter area is called 'Rungi-Poingar'—'the place of
[361] beaches'. Most camps are made on beaches or sandy
patches in the bush, but a horde in Blue Mud Bay haunts
an outcrop of stone and clay far out on a mangrove mud
flat, and consequently their camp is known as 'Lokor-Poingar'—'the place of feet'; and the reference is to the
spreading mangrove roots or feet.

LANGUAGES, SIGNS AND SMOKE-SIGNALS

From Cape Wilberforce to Arnhem Bay the ruggedness 103
of the coastline is exceeded only by the precipitous bluffs [133]
of the English Company's Islands near by, and the whole area is known as 'Bwartaba' or 'rocky country', 'wartaba' being the name for rocks. Cape Grey is a prominent headland in the Gulf of Carpentaria and is called 'Bokorral', 'bokor' referring to the cliff-face and also to the human forehead.

Names for birds are sound-perfect imitations of bird calls. 192
A crow is known by the raucous 'warrk', and native-companions making a noise resembling a low-toned gargle are called 'gorral-kor'. The brown pheasant calls pleasantly on several clipped notes and is known as 'bukbuk'.

Pithy sayings are in common use, and the best known have 195
English equivalents. 'Mata-rang' is a man who never wanders far from his horde territory, or, when infrequently visiting distant friends, is for ever anxious to return home; literally he is a stick-in-the-mud. The term is also given to an adolescent who finds his mother's company preferable to that of boys of his own age and who follows her when she hunts for food.

If a man comes into a friendly camp and wishes to pass on important news, he waits for a lull in the conversation, and [521]
remarks cryptically: 'When the tide goes out, have a look on the beach and you will find something.' His hearers are instantly alert and make an opportunity for him to tell his story. There seem to be trouble-makers in every camp, with their accusations, rumours, and quarrels, and in [578]
exasperation they may be told to 'Get out and camp by yourself till the wind cleans your hair'.

Stone Age man has an extensive sign-language or semi- 201
ology, and I accumulated a vocabulary of over two hundred simple signs for common customs, names, questions, instructions, and relationships. Sign-terms are generally imitations of the subject referred to; when making the sign

201 for a camp, a man raises his open palm and rests the side of his head on it, plainly suggesting a sleeping-place. Mosquitoes are suggested by stabbing a forefinger on parts of the anatomy, a shark is suggested by biting the forefinger, and to suggest a stingaree the same finger is swept down and forward from the mouth to imply the dangerous whipcord tail. A hand closed and held upright, with the extended forefinger waving inwards suggestively, refers to a man, and in the case of a boy, the same movement is followed by indicating his height. Rubbing the eyes with the fist signifies tears, and to say 'he is funny man' the signaller opens his mouth, nods his head and points to the humorist. Sucking the forefinger implies a fish; water is implied by tapping a bulge in the cheek. A stroke across the throat serves for a turtle, though the several varieties have further distinguishing signs.

Reference to the spearing of either men or game is by a casual flick of the right hand across the middle of the body. An ambush or stealthy night-raid is appropriately indicated by wiping the hand downwards over the face; death, or a corpse, by holding a hand in front of the face, with the fingers curved stiffly like claws. Hanging the fingers downwards from above the head serves for rain, and a clenched hand on the cheek means an egg.

Sentences are semaphored by a series of quick movements, [521] and I have known men to sit silently by a camp fire and converse for hours in sign language when the only sound was an occasional burst of laughter after the recounting of some episode. When returning to Yirrkala with nomads 202 in a canoe, they said there was trouble on the station and pointed to several men waving from the cliff-face. We were a mile from shore when one of the signallers took a piece of paper-bark and waved it so as to make his movements clearer. The crew read his message and told me that two local men had been ambushed and speared near Blue Mud Bay. Not

only did he identify the killers by relationship signs, but said 202
that only one body had been recovered and that the killers
had escaped to their own country near Arnhem Bay.

Undoubtedly this sign-language has been used in silently 201
planning and directing well-organized attacks that be- [721]
wildered marauding traders and took police parties by
surprise. Attempts have been made to prove that messages [202]
have been tapped out on musical clapsticks, but clapsticks
are used only for a limited number of timings in songs. [533]
Full details and the signal for attack have been given un-
obtrusively in sign-language by merely flicking the hands.

Just as the spoken language is a living one, so the sign- 201
language is being extended to include developments from 177
contact with foreigners. Reference to police is made by placing the wrists side by side and holding them in front to suggest handcuffs. Macassar proas and sailing-boats are indicated by stretching an arm forward, clenching the hand, and raising the thumb for a mast; a boat captain by closing the hands, as on a wheel, and swaying from the hips as when heaving on a helm. A white man's sign is in bending the elbows, sweeping the hands to the breasts and then downwards and outwards; his gun in bending the head to the right, squinting along an imaginary barrel held in the left hand, and drawing the right trigger hand backwards. Wiping a crooked forefinger along the lips refers to tobacco; cattle or tinned meat are denoted by placing a closed hand on either temple and extending the forefingers to look like horns.

I took Burramurra to Darwin for medical attention, and after a few days' treatment I brought him from hospital. He attracted some attention by his awkward gait, and another nomad waved his hands and looked questioningly toward us, till Burramurra answered him with laughter and further hand movements. He told me he had just been asked if he had been drinking whisky and where had he got it?

YULENGOR

211 Nomads have not acquired the art of recording their [212] thoughts, but they make use of the well-known 'letter-stick', and those I have received have been handed over with a certain breathlessness, as if they were charmed missives. Their use is intended to lend an importance to a message, which however cannot be deciphered by the recipient. All he sees on the flat oblong chip of wood is a series of carved lines, circles, and crosses, probably partly covered by a coat of red ochre. After an appropriate examination of the stick the bearer is invariably called on to decode the message. He obligingly takes it, and pointing to one mark says that it represents the writer, that another is for his brother, that several strokes refer to a number of days or lunar months, and that a wide cut is a request for a canoe or an indication of the strength of a raiding party. Marks on letter-sticks merely remind the bearer of points in the message he is conveying. The last line on all letter-sticks sent to me invariably ended with the request: 'Please send me some tobacco.'

Before leaving Darwin on the first trip to east Arnhem [648] Land, I visited three brothers who were serving sentences for having murdered Japanese fishermen in Caledon Bay. They were glum and disinterested till I told them where I was going, and they then asked me to take a letter-stick to their father. Weeks later I delivered this message on an isolated beach near Caledon Bay, and that night the camp sang and wailed over memories revived by the letter-stick.

202 Probably the most popular of all delusions concerning the 372 nomad is that he sends messages by means of smoke. I am not aware that any aboriginal has ever sent any coded signal by smoke; yet, on the other hand, they will interpret smoke-fire as indicating the presence of visitors and will light fires for an easily understood purpose, or in accordance with a pre-arranged plan. Fires that break out unex- [775] pectedly and perhaps are due to smouldering logs bursting

into flame long after a bush-fire has passed, are in all 202
seriousness attributed to mischievous spirits. All fires thus 372
have some meaning, and though their significance may be [775]
wrongly interpreted, they do play an important part in elementary signalling.

A family brought the news to Yirrkala that a woman and her child were dangerously ill near Port Bradshaw, and as Mataman was going that way a few days later, he promised to let the local people know about the patients by smoke-fires. If they were dead he was to light a smoke-fire, and if they had recovered he was to do nothing. When great clouds of smoke billowed over the hills the following day, it was assumed that the woman was dead, and the usual wailing [765] and mourning songs were sung. However, a few days later the woman and her child walked into Yirrkala and explained that Mataman had been hunting kangaroos and had lit a fire to smoke them out.

Friendly visitors invariably light fires to give warning of their approach; otherwise they might be mistaken for [574] enemies, and speared. In any case they do not know where their hosts are hunting, and they light fires to invite an answer from the camp they intend visiting. Smoke is also sent up as a warning signal when anything untoward happens, and a passing lugger is enough to start a line of fires. As each party of hunters sees the boat, they light fires to warn their friends.

The rapidity with which detailed messages are passed from one camp to another has led to the assumption that [203] information has been sent by secret smoke-signals. But the message-carriers are human. I have known men and women to travel long distances by night and, by taking short cuts, to be on the beach the following morning to meet the lugger after we had sailed some sixty miles overnight.

A government officer was due to arrive at the station by air, and as the Yulengor had not previously seen an aeroplane

202 they were excited and nervous. Some were scared and fled
372 along the coast, but they had agreed to light smoke-fires when they saw the plane. Half an hour before the plane landed their smoke went up, and afterwards we heard that Yulengor fifty miles away, who had known nothing about the coming of the plane, had lit fires when they saw it, and the signals had been repeated nearer and nearer to us. I told the visitor that we had been warned of his approach by smoke-signals, and thinking of it, in the common manner, as being one of the mysterious and secret accomplishments freely attributed to aborigines, he asked: 'And what did they say about me?'

CHAPTER EIGHT

Family Life in the Jungle

A FAMILY is the most important unit in aboriginal society, 614
and the horde is founded on it. Some families have as few 621
as three members; the largest I saw was that in which
Wonggu had twenty-six wives and fifty children. A horde
consists of a father's family and his sons' families, and if a
few generations of sons escape their enemies' spears the horde
is a large one. Upon this simple horde-family relationship
depends the entire intricate, bewildering, and far-reaching
aboriginal social organization.

Polygamy is an ancient custom and has an economic 595
basis, for women are the chief food-gatherers and are 182
coveted as assets and never regarded as expensive luxuries.
A man cannot foresee the number of wives he is to have, but
he hopes for several, and as his influence increases there is a
tendency to bestow women on him. Bestowal of women is
so arranged that old men obtain young wives and young
men generally receive old widows, and incongruous as the
arrangement may seem to us it ensures that old men have
active women to hunt for them and their elderly wives, and [587]
that the young men, well able to look after themselves, make
do with elderly widows. Prestige lies with the old men, and [554]
they enforce the practice despite constant objections from [888]
both the young men and the young women. As youths grow
older their authority increases and they in turn bargain for
young women.

Women live a much harder life than men, and are 888
neglected and unwanted as they grow old before their time; 562

888 [562] perhaps partially blind, with rheumatism stiffening their joints, and with their small and once shapely hands calloused and twisted through digging. In a mustering camp, I overheard casual remarks which led me to suspect that two old women had been left by younger wives to perish in the bush. None of the Yulengor attached any importance to the story, and I found it hard to obtain reliable information. They were just not interested, and by the time I arrived on the scene, the aged women had been dead for a day or more. One had been blind and had been left at this camp in the sand-hills without water or shelter, although both were to be had a few chains distant. Countless dingo tracks led to and from the horror we buried under a pile of stones.

595 462 Stone Age man is usually benevolently disposed toward his wives, but when he has a number of them he tends to leave the work to them, and only as he feels inclined does he exercise a man's prerogative and hunt for kangaroos, wallabies, and emus, or spear fish and turtle. He is expected to control his women. He adds little to the small-talk, and when he does make a remark it is generally of the kind that implies: 'When I ope' my lips, let no dog bark.' Old Baratjuna reclined in camp whilst his wives prepared for the hunt. Some were going to a distant swamp, others were to forage near by. One wife wanted to go to the swamp, but her husband told her to stay in the camp and mind the young children. She complained for a time, and seeing that she provoked no response she made a move to go to the swamp. But before she had taken a dozen paces her husband threw his stone axe at her and broke a rib; that, as far as he was concerned, ended the incident.

595 562 [582] From childhood, women take an inferior place; they are often studiously ignored; they are treated as chattels, yet genuine family affection does exist. The constitution of a family is sometimes conducive to good feeling, for a man's

wives are often sisters—a relationship which is likely to be 595
favourable to very young wives, who often are no more than 562
ten or twelve years of age when married and go to live with [582]
their older sisters. More than likely, the mother will later [591]
follow them to the outskirts of the new family circle; there to
sit by her own small fire and to be suffered in silence by her
son-in-law. Young wives are married as children and are
regarded by the husband almost as nieces. Older wives,
according to their disposition, may treat these children
kindly or force them to hew and carry and attend their
whims. Older women give the younger ones rigid training
in wifely duties, and the arrangement often works out
happily. I have seen young wives, and old ones too, cry
without restraint when they have been unable to accompany
the husband on a hunting trip.

It has been said that aboriginal women are treated with 562
constant brutality and that they play an unimportant role
in the decisions of the horde. This is not so, although a wife [593]
is at the disposal of her husband and the tone of her existence
depends upon his character. Stone Age woman's life is
hard, like that of all Stone Age nomads, but her influence
is much more important than is popularly imagined. Women [578]
join in all camp disputes—indeed, with their gossip they
often cause them—and their voices can be heard above
the din of shouting men and howling dogs. In peace- [728]
making ceremonies they taunt the offenders, abusing them
and brandishing digging-sticks in their faces, and they urge
their sons either to make peace or destroy the offender. I
have seen several peace-making ceremonies collapse because
women urged their men to attack the offenders who were
suing for peace.

In rare instances termagants control their families and
sons' families by criticizing, nagging, and threatening.
Late one day I came out of the bush to a camp where
Yakangaiya and his married sons were sitting quietly in

562 598 groups by their fire, cooking fish and waiting for their wives and mothers to come with food and firewood. For an hour or more Damilipi, the oldest of Yakangaiya's wives, partially blind, stark naked, and switching flies with a bunch of twigs, strode up and down haranguing and insulting her men, accusing them of cowardice and laziness in not raiding their [628] hereditary enemies and continuing a feud which was dying by mutual consent. Damilipi's campaign was continued for two days, and as other women joined her the horde was roused to the point of organizing a killing party. Weeks later the men attacked, and in the reprisals two of Damilipi's sons and a daughter-in-law were killed.

583 Wives may be acquired by bestowal, by the passing on of widows, or by theft or capture. Bestowal is the most frequent [582] method, and tribal law provides that a woman must marry her father's sister's son or, should this be impracticable, an equally well-defined alternate husband is provided. Relationships are ageless, and if there are no women in the right marriage-relationship a man not infrequently remains a bachelor till a woman is captured or an elderly widow is available.

Peculiarities result from the practice of bestowal, in that a man does not acquire a mother-in-law by marrying her daughter, but conversely he marries a daughter because her mother has always been his mother-in-law. Several brothers may have the same mother-in-law, who may not have enough daughters for them all, and this gives rise to the practice of promising even an unborn wife to a prospective husband. 'Inipi' is a rite whereby an acceptable son-in-law takes the sebum from his cheek by the side of his nose and anoints the abdomen of his mother-in-law, sometimes while she is still in her infancy, and thereafter all her children come under the special care of the son-in-law, who makes presents to her sons and marries her daughters. By the Inipi rite, one of several brothers may have prior claims and obtain several wives from the same woman, though his brothers remain in bachelor solitude. 583

Dangatji, who had a small daughter, went to the youthful Geitpapoi and made a proposal: 'I have a daughter who some day will marry; she cannot marry you, because she is your tribal mother-in-law, but her daughter will be in the right relationship for marriage. If you want my unborn granddaughter, let us come to an understanding. If you start making payments through my daughter I will see that eventually you get her daughter.' Geitpapoi closed on the deal immediately, and performed the rite of Inipi on his infant mother-in-law, through whom he cheerfully made frequent payments to Dangatji of spears, stone axes, dilly-bags, and food. In time the mother-in-law grew up, Dangatji settled her marriage, and she was taken off to her husband's territory where her first child, a son, was born. Geitpapoi kept up his payments, though no longer to Dangatji, but to the mother-in-law's husband, in the hope that eventually she would produce him a wife. When a daughter was born, the mother sent a message to Geitpapoi: 'Son-in-law, your wife has now arrived; I will mind her for you until she grows up, but I need more food, and further presents.' All these were forthcoming from a gratified Geitpapoi, who brought the best of his food to his mother-in-law and made frequent presents to his tribal father-in-law.

Having served for over twenty years for a wife, Geitpapoi came to claim her, and his mother-in-law prepared the bridal camp. Three fires were lit on the beach, and that night Geitpapoi and his bride slept between two of them whilst the mother-in-law slept on the outside. A mother-in-law stays with the young wife, who is said to be timid and afraid of her husband; she will not so much as speak to him but confines her remarks to her mother, in her husband's hearing. Such timidity is often genuine, and continues for 585

585 a week or ten days, till the husband takes her away to the bush, where they set up camp by themselves.

583 All negotiations for wives do not run smoothly, for if a prospective husband's horde quarrels with the horde of the father-in-law, the Inipi agreement will probably lapse, or if one tribal son-in-law offers better payment than another, the result is not hard to foresee. Our house-boy, Naradjin, wanted to buy a wife, but the father of the girl, though considering his suit and receiving gifts from him, was also negotiating with Baradjuna, who, despite being sixty years old and having eleven wives, had performed the Inipi rite and expected the girl to come to him. Both men stood in the correct tribal relationship to the girl, and the problem deteriorated into a question of who had the greater influence. At one stage, Baradjuna took the girl and cleared out, and the argument would probably have ended there had not the girl run back to her father. Tribal hostilities in a distant but related horde caused the breaking off of diplomatic relations with Baradjuna, and the balance finally swung in favour of Naradjin when the girl's father, in a moment of wrathful indignation, bestowed his daughter upon him.

587 An aboriginal marries all the widows, childless or otherwise, of his deceased blood or tribal brother. Every woman usually stands in the relationship of wife to a number of men who are tribal brothers. She marries one of them and, if he dies, she and her children automatically enter the camp of another brother who has always been her tribal husband as well as a tribal father to her children. For this reason a man does not know the number of wives and half-grown children he is likely to acquire through the deaths of brothers, and irrespective of his personal views, desires or efforts toward obtaining a family, he has little say in the matter. Fortunately Stone Age women are not burdensome, for they are food-gatherers, and children are their responsibility.

583 Natural affinity between youths and the young wives of

old men often results in 'Murramburr' or marriage-by-theft, 583 for if a young man cannot obtain a wife by peaceful means he sometimes attempts to capture women. Gwaipiji wanted a wife, so he considered the daughters of his tribal mothers-in-law, but he found that they were all married to tribal husbands. Turning his attention to one of them, he decided to steal her, so he went to her husband's country and waited till the women were hunting, and then he forced the girl to go with him.

Bununggu, the girl's husband, resented the theft and told 684 his troubles to his brothers who were visiting a friendly 682 horde. He suggested that, as Gwaipiji was also friendly with them, he would eventually wander into their camp with the runaway wife, and they could then kill him and return the woman. They agreed to the proposal, so Bununggu camped with them till, in a few weeks, as he had anticipated, Gwaipiji arrived with the woman. Bununggu visited the erring couple and formally remonstrated with Gwaipiji: 'Why did you take my wife? She was never promised to you, whereas I have been paying for her for years. She is a good food-gatherer, and as I have no other wives I want her back.' But Gwaipiji also wanted the woman: 'All you say is true, but now that I have her I intend to keep her. I have no wives, all my mothers-in-law have disposed of their children, and I have no prospects of getting a wife. You, on the other hand, have three infants promised to you by the Inipi rite.'

Bununggu sat in silence as Gwaipiji thus signed his death warrant. He was not even listening, for he intended to kill Gwaipiji and recapture the woman. As the morning star rose and the camp was asleep, two youths came to Gwaipiji's fire and speared him in the back. Bununggu also blooded his spear, and in the resulting bedlam he dragged the woman to the side of his dying rival and made the customary speech over him, giving reasons for the attack, but more particularly

684 682 stating his case to bystanders: 'I "pushed" these young men to kill you because you took my wife; she was not promised to you, she was never yours and always belonged to me. That is why you die.'

Wife-stealing usually results in the woman being brutally beaten or speared, and whether she goes willingly with the seducer or is forcefully stolen makes no difference to her punishment. She shows no resentment, and indeed she regards lenient treatment as a slight to her charms.

848 Because of Yulengor marriage customs the question of illegitimate children does not occur. There are frequent illicit relations, but as every girl has a husband her children do not arouse comment. If an irregular union should be openly consummated, the children do not suffer permanently, for irregular births are absorbed into the horde and into relationships which they would have had if their mother had been correctly mated.

163 Women have about two children each, though some have as many as five or six and one I know has a dozen. Many children are born, but the population is not increasing, except on mission stations where medical attention is available and child-welfare taught. [165] In the bush, infant mortality is high, and long periods elapse between births. 862 Children are not weaned till they are five or six years of age, and I have seen grandmothers ten years and more after the birth of their last child successfully suckling grandchildren.

844 In child-birth Nature is allowed to take her course and no assistance is given beyond occasional pressure. If the child is born normally and quickly, it probably survives, and so does the mother, but when anything abnormal occurs there [845] is a stillborn child and the mother is often injured in a way that prevents her from having any more children. Blood accompanying the placenta is tabu and is meticulously buried. Ordinarily the mother is walking within three or four hours of a birth, and within a day she goes hunting.

FAMILY LIFE IN THE JUNGLE

Theories of conception and birth have been severely 842
jolted in recent years, for until recently it was not known that [177]
intercourse had any connection with conception, and
Yulengor regarded it as being merely a natural and satisfying [831]
function. There are no virgins in aboriginal society, for at
an early age a girl is handed over to her husband and is
married for the rest of her life. In parts of western Arnhem [574]
Land, when hordes gather for ceremonies, their hosts provide [837]
them with food and also advance their wives for the visitors'
well-being. The question of illegitimate children does not [848]
arise, for births are thought to be the work of a spirit.

At some time when the potential father is hunting, the 842
spirit of his prospective child comes to him and presents him 787
with a large fish or turtle and enables him to spear it. Not
yet comprehending the omen, the man returns to camp with
the spirit at heel, and when all are asleep this spirit enters the
mother and begins its preparations for birth. In a variation
of this belief, the spirit follows the mother when she goes for
water, and jumps into the water so as to enter the woman.
When a man knows that his wife is to become a mother he
endeavours to recall some unusual experience that has
befallen him in hunting. His mind dwells on any large fish
he has caught, perhaps in the last month, or maybe several
years previously, and he regards this incident as marking
the coming of the spirit-child.

Half-caste children compelled a readjustment of these 842
ideas. First it was assumed that eating the white man's food 177
or the wearing of white clothing caused white-skinned
offspring. An anthropologist, visiting an Arnhem Land
mission station at the invitation of a missionary of irreproachable
character, asked an aboriginal why his normal
full-blood son had a light skin. The father's startling reply
was: 'The child's mother works in the missionary's house.'

According to a revised and popular birth theory, intercourse 842
is necessary only as an act of preparation. In itself [833]

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SHELL MIDDEN

An experimental cut was made into a shell midden beside an old Yulengor camp

[facing p 70]

842 it is an invitation to the new spirit to come to the mother
[833] from the spirit world. Ideas on the birth question are very
vague and the time factor is ignored. Wogburra, who had
been taught to read and write and had lived amongst white
folk for twenty years, told me that his wife was about to give
birth to a child, and gossip named Miniji as the father. He
intended to spear Miniji. I asked when his wife had last
seen Miniji, and he was certain that it had been two years
previously, when Miniji left for his tribal country.

849 Babies are smoky pink in colour at birth, and mothers
142 smear them with a mixture of ashes and water to hasten the
darkening of the skin. From birth the child lies in the sun,
854 and as soon as it can clutch a chunk of red meat it is allowed
[853] to suck it. A mother carries her infant under her arm on a
thick roll of soft bark, but the child soon learns to sit on her
shoulder; it clutches her hair for support and sleeps through
a great part of the day. Most babies are curly headed, fat,
142 strong, and contented, but as soon as they start eating bush
food they develop distended stomachs and become thin
and prone to disease.

855 In the better type of family the utmost affection is shown
[595] by all wives toward the children of the husband's other
wives, and it is sometimes difficult to say which is the mother.
[853] She does not always suckle it herself, nor does the infant
object to a variation. If a mother dies, the care of her
children is assured, and I have seen only two children that
could be called waifs or strays.

Children are pampered unbelievably and are rarely
[861] punished. The most a mother will do when her patience is
exhausted is to shake it by the shoulder, shout at it and
threaten it with a ghost or a white man. Imitating their
857 elders, the youngsters learn their lessons and make fun for
themselves in the hard days of childhood, though their games
seem to foreshadow the strenuous adult life ahead of them. Girls
play at gathering food, making huts and weaving dilly-bags,

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FOOD GATHERERS

Women and children setting out to search for food

[facing p 71]

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and boys shape spears and learn to throw them. In a mock fight the bodies are carried off to the accompaniment of shouting and wailing and are buried with only the nostrils showing above the sand. Children also have a game of wife-stealing, in which the boys chase the girls as they pretend to dig for yams. If the day is hot, sticks are thrown into the water, and with cries of 'Fish, fish!' small children spear them and throw them on the sand. For turtle feasts, the turtles are made from sand and bark, and their tracks in the sand are really well formed by hand. String games and cat's-cradle are popular with the girls; they twist the string on their fingers, and sometimes use their feet as well, to make birds' claws, turtle, dogs, cats, the sun, moon and stars, and representations of scores of activities in ordinary life and from myths and legends.

One of their happiest pastimes is singing and chanting about one another. A small girl, Junebia, had short flat feet, so her friends chanted interminably: 'Stumpy, stumpy; turtle feet, turtle feet; stumpy turtle feet.' A boy with long thin legs was greeted with: 'Snaky legs, snaky legs; snaky legs that wriggle as you run.' Another lad, with a habit of looking quickly from side to side, was subjected to the ditty: 'Willy wagtail, willy wagtail; you're a willy wagtail.' Every child seems to have a peculiarity worthy of a chant, and it is surprising that no one objects to the game or shows annoyance when laughed at in this way.

CHAPTER NINE

Hordes at Home and at War

616 773 AN aboriginal myth says that tribal and social laws were made by spirit-Ancestors. Spirit-Ancestors wandered through the country begetting the first aboriginal children and instructing them in secret ceremonies, sacred songs, and dances. These first-born nomads were divided by the Ancestors into two great Dua and Yiritja moieties, and today a Dua man can marry only a Yiritja woman, or vice versa, and all children belong to the father's moiety.

616 624 This rule applies through the family to the numerous small hordes, for the horde is an enlarged patriarchal family in which the men and their children are members of one of the moieties, and wives and mothers belong to the other. [589] Unmarried adult daughters and sisters are unknown in any horde, for they are bestowed in childhood to become wives in hordes of the opposite moiety.

617 582 Each moiety includes four marriage-groups or subsections; the total of eight forms the framework of a marriage and social system. To obtain a wife, a man theoretically considers whether he is Dua or Yiritja; a Dua man invariably marries a Yiritja woman. The problem is further complicated in that he, being Dua, belongs to one of the four Dua marriage-sections and therefore not only marries a Yiritja woman, but a woman who must be from one of its four marriage-subsections, although marriage into a specified second section is allowed. Children of this union take the father's Dua moiety, though they will not belong to his marriage-subsection, nor yet to the mother's, but to another indirectly determined by the mother's.

HORDES AT HOME AND AT WAR

It sounded very complicated to me, but I found that all 617
aborigines could name their relationships just as easily as 582
I could recall, say, my first-cousin relationship. In its simplest form the organization provides that a man marries his mother's brother's daughter. Similar systems have operated throughout Australia and are by no means unknown elsewhere. In an ancient biblical folklore story, the aged Abraham sent for his eldest servant, and said: 'Put your hand under my thigh and swear that you will not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But go to my country and take a wife unto my son Isaac.' In later years Isaac in turn said to his son Jacob: 'Arise, go to Padanaram to the house' (horde-family) 'of Bethuel your mother's father and take a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother.'

Neither a man's sons nor his sons' sons procure wives from the same marriage-subsection as he; for though the sons are of the same moiety as the father, Dua or Yiritja, and from the same horde family, they definitely belong to another marriage-subsection. A man's sons' sons' sons' son, however, known to us as his great-great-grandson, is identical with him in marriage-subsection and recommences the marriage-cycle by seeking a wife from the same marriage-subsection as did his great-great-grandfather. Perhaps it should be mentioned that a man must not marry his father's sister's daughter, but he may marry his mothers' brother's daughter. Cross-cousin marriage is prevented.

Amazing as it may seem, a nomad knows with certainty 602
the moiety, horde, and marriage-subsection from which even an unborn infant will seek a wife, and where in turn his hypothetical offspring will find wives. He finds it a very simple thing to trace any family-tree indefinitely, for all the members of scattered hordes in a tribal group are related, and a man can name his relationship to any other nomad, even one whom he has never seen, who may live hundreds of

602 miles away and belong to a horde of hereditary enemies.

Yulengor imagine that white people belong to tribal
602
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groups similar to their own, and that everyone in them is related. They were incredulous, and thought we were joking, when we told them that there were thousands of white folk whom we had never seen, and that my wife and I had not known each other until shortly before we were married, and that our marriage was of our own choice and freewill.

A government medical officer, accompanied by a lady, came by plane to inspect the station, and Yulengor women asked my wife to explain the relationship between the airman and his passenger, for they had heard that she was not his wife. It was beyond their understanding that the visitors were not related, and they asked repeatedly if the lady were his sister, wife, or daughter. Finally their outraged sense of fitness was satisfied when my wife said that the lady was the sister-in-law of another government officer. This explanation was greeted with murmurs of relief, and they concluded that as all government officers must be 'brothers', one man's wife stood in the tribal relationship of 'wife' to all the other government 'brothers', and all her sisters would be similarly related to them.

582 A man marries his tribal wife, 'galei', and ordinarily she is his mother's brother's daughter. But all the daughters of a mother's brother are a man's 'galei', and if he is fortunate he may marry all of them, but if there are other tribal brothers who stand in an identical relationship with these 'galei', it is unlikely that one man will obtain them all.

601 As a name, 'galei' is used not only for tribal wives, but also in ordinary conversation; a man applies this term to his own wives' brothers, his brothers' wives and paternal first cousins' wives. There are two dozen similar terms, and some of them cover as many as sixteen different types of relatives, that are as distant as the four varieties of galei. Others are

murulkurr' (referring to wives' mothers' brothers), and 601
'nguti walkurr' (wives' mothers' mothers' brothers). In all I
traced over one hundred different relationships, of which
only about one-third had English equivalents. Fortunately
for us, modern society does not recognize the remainder,
for some of them are involved and interminable—such as
'mumulkurr', who may be wives' maternal grandmothers,
or grandmother's brothers' wives, or maternal uncles'
wives' mothers.

There are several groups of loosely knit hordes in Arnhem 619
Land. In the west from Cape Don to the Liverpool River,
thirty hordes are associated in common society, each speaking
similar dialects, but, as a social group, having no intercourse
other than that of a warlike nature with adjacent horde-groups.
Again, immediately east of Cape Stewart, and
extending to Blue Mud Bay, two hundred and fifty miles
away, is the group of thirty-six hordes amongst whom I
spent most of my time. A peculiarity of these large independent
groups is that they are nameless, though occasionally
reference may be made to 'island people' or 'mountain folk'.
Yulengor from the Murungga Island horde are frequently
called 'Murrnggin'. Hordes in the Gulf country call those
in the west 'Meerwaitj', which means 'Where the sun goes
down', and the Meerwaitj vaguely refer to the eastern
Yulengor as 'Wornba' or 'Where the sun gets up'. These
are only vague local references; the social group as a whole
is nameless.

Throughout Arnhem Land many sacred trees, wells, 773
creeks, springs, reefs, and peculiar rocks, were visited by the 778
creative Ancestors, and here they performed important acts
and instructed their children in their lore. Yams and
digging-sticks, used first by the Ancestors, are linked to a [779]
totemic well where the earliest nomads were taught to dig
for food, and at another creek the pandanus palm umbrella
mat, 'Ngunmurra', was first introduced.

YULENGOR

779 Totems in sacred ceremonies are known as 'maraian', and generally denote some utensil used by the Ancestors. Maraian may also be birds, animals, or fish intimately linked with the Ancestors. Parts of the nomad's anatomy, representing that of an Ancestor, and usually their reproductive organs, feature in song and dance. Such caricatures are accepted by the nomads, but I have seen consternation and embarrassment amongst mixed parties of white visitors attending these ceremonies.

779 Totemic beliefs link widely separated hordes, who meet
796 for ceremonies connected with the creation myth, for bone-
614 burying and for initiations. Several clans may be co-
621 guardians of the same sacred site, such as the Reratjingo of
778 Port Bradshaw and the Lia-gullomirry from the Woolen
River, who are separated by about a hundred and fifty
miles, yet both belong to the Dua moiety and have close
connexions with a sacred well on the Woolen River where a
great mythical snake in Creation days distinguished himself
by swallowing two of the Ancestresses. Guardianship of this
site has been mainly in the hands of the Woolen River
horde, but at rare intervals Reratjingo men from Port
Bradshaw make their way to the well and take part in the
ceremonies. A sacred maraian, consisting of a painted
hollow log, represents the snake, and is the centre of the rite,
and at certain stages in the proceedings the leader blows
through it to produce dull, booming reverberations which
are said to be the voice of the snake. An old man of the
visiting Reratjingo returned to Port Bradshaw, painted a
[178] similar maraian, and introduced the ceremony to his
horde; now his sons, grandsons, and nephews carry out the
ritual of this totem.

778 Some designs and myths, painted on maraian in coloured
531 clays, or bound with string and parrot feathers, involve
weeks of careful preparation. A shower of rain will efface
the paint, moths may consume the string; the horde leader

must memorize the design. Blank spaces on maraian are 778
due to the artist's loss of memory, and they freely admit that 531
they have forgotten some parts of the design.

As well as having a link with the distant Woolen River, 628
the Reratjingo had its own totem centre near Port Bradshaw, 614
and were co-guardians with the Kalpu. But this did not 621
guarantee unity, for the question of guardianship led to 779
quarrels in which several were killed and the Reratjingo 778
withdrawing to Melville Bay forty miles away. But the Kalpu victory was short lived, for in driving off the Reratjingo they so weakened the home-front, that their hereditary enemies, the Juppu of Blue Mud Bay, descended on them with such vindictiveness that the remnant fled to the English Company's Islands eighty miles away, and they have been on the defensive ever since.

Prolonged friendships between hordes does not prevent 628
the sudden cessation of diplomatic relations, and an oc- 578
casional killing. The Gerrkee from Cape Shield had fraternized, hunted, and camped for years with the Juppa. Though they were of opposite moieties, they exchanged secret law, held totemic dances, and seemed inseparable. Yet one night when I was visiting their camp I saw that they were at loggerheads, and soon afterwards they brandished their spears, attacked each other, yelling threats and obscenities. It all started at the end of a successful day's hunting, when everyone had more than enough to eat and a Juppa woman hit her Gerrkee husband with a digging-stick after a trivial disagreement. He retaliated by knocking her down and bumping her head on the ground. Her father heard her screams, and remonstrated with his son-in-law, who then called on his brothers for assistance. In a flash, both clans were in a fracas. Women used their digging-sticks, or lengths of wood from the camp-fires, and darted in amongst the men to deal their blows. Men slashed with yard-long flat spear-throwers. After an hour of bedlam,

628 [578] of dust and of yelping dingoes, the noise subsided; the families wandered back to their camps, and by morning the disturbance seemed to have been forgotten.

But not all disturbances end so amicably, for with a killing a blood-feud is established, and these sometimes go on for years. One day a nomad brought word to me of tribal hostilities in the hills behind Caledon Bay, and hastily loading camping-gear, medical equipment, and stores on the motor launch, I set out with two boys to make a quick trip down the Gulf coast. We saw smoke on a beach near Caledon Bay, and on the shore we found the Yulengor resting after their flight, nursing their wounds and cooking a turtle.

Two days previously the women, children, and a few old men had been left in a selected camp when the men went off on one of their kangaroo hunts. At the end of the day the hunters were weary, and camped for the night. Before dawn one of the frequent raiding or 'meringor' parties crept up on the women's camp and hurled spears into the sleeping groups. Casualties were light, but a passing spear fatally slashed an infant's wrist and killed the mother; several old men and children were also wounded. Two women ran to inform the men, who hastily collected the scattered members of the camp, and before morning the whole party was on its way to Caledon Bay.

I dressed their wounds and gave several injections for yaws, but the camp was restless. Through the night a dozen false alarms were given, and early the following morning the men set off in their canoes with women and children trailing along the beaches. We left shortly afterwards and passed some of the canoes and saw the paddlers waving and pointing to the first catch of the day, a large turtle which they had harpooned. Until we passed out of sight in the early afternoon a long wall of smoke rose from the track behind [224] the beaches where women and children were travelling and

firing long grass to drive out edible snakes, rats, and goannas. 628
Others searched the beaches for concealed turtle nests, which [224]
often yield from five to ten dozen eggs. [222]

Raids are common, and as the men are killed the vendetta passes from one generation to another. Entire hordes have been exterminated, and today there are several remnants in which a couple of women or old men are all that remain from clans once large. Usually the feuds continue till the [728]
parties find it desirable to negotiate for peace to allow some [796]
ceremony to be held. Big ceremonies involving several hordes are invariably preceded by these peacemaking 'Makkarratas', for before they can sing and dance together they must adjust their differences.

For the 'makkarrata', the opposing clans take up positions 728
about two hundred yards apart and face each other. 796
Members of the offending horde run again and again 628
toward the avengers, who throw spears at them. If the offence is a serious one, the killer may be killed; but the culprit uses his skill to side-step the spears, and it is seldom that these trials-by-ordeal prove fatal. Having agreed to establish peace, the avengers throw their spears as a gesture of disapproval, often with no intent to harm.

Once the avengers have thrown their spears and exhibited their indignation, a neutral party conducts the culprit to them. He reverses his spears and hands them over, turns his back and presents a thigh for a spear to be plunged into it. By the drawing of blood the crime is expiated and tension is released. Avengers and neutrals crowd round the culprit, congratulating him in the friendliest manner and ridiculing the idea of bad blood ever existing between them. Usually they make a combined camp and spend the night in singing and dancing.

CHAPTER TEN

Medicine-Men and Magic

756 MAGIC, superstition, and credulity are inseparable from
Stone Age medical practices. Healing magic is in the hands
of a benevolent witch-doctor known as a 'marrnggit'. His
name comes from the common word 'marrnggi', denoting
knowledge, understanding, and insight. Good marrnggits
are few and far between; their power and influence develop
with age and astuteness. In almost every small horde, one
man lays claim to supernatural powers, and although not
professing to have the full inspiration of a genuine marrnggit
[755] he will massage a stomach for diarrhoea or claim to suck out
a mouthful of animal bones, pebbles, and blood from
painful kidneys. A marrnggit is not made by choice, for the
calling is by inspiration, and a mythical animal, resembling
[787] a small honey-squirrel and known as a 'manggata', enters a
man and transforms him into a marrnggit. Even so, a fully
developed marrnggit cannot diagnose sickness or see an evil
spirit; the little manggata does it for him.

Wattia was a good marrnggit, and it all began one day when he was asleep in his camp and a manggata came to him. The animal won his attention by digging a hole in his skull, but fortunately leaving the job half done. He returned later, when Wattia was seriously ill, and exercised his healing 'medicine'. As Wattia recovered, the manggata came the third time, and said: 'Do you remember that sickness? It was I who hit you and then returned and healed you. You know now that I have the power to kill and to heal.' Wattia talked with the manggata and admitted his claims, whereupon the spirit-animal took possession of his body and settled in his heart. Wattia immediately felt new strength 756 and the desire to heal sickness in his friends. But he still did not know how to go about it, till another marrnggit came along and recognized the manggata in Wattia. He said: 'Wattia, you have a manggata there.'

'Yes, I know, he is new, and I have not worked with him.'

Shortly afterwards a woman was taken ill, and the visiting marrnggit told Wattia to test his skill: 'Wattia, you go and heal her and I will stand by and watch.'

Not having the least idea of what he should do, Wattia relied on the manggata who showed him the sickness, and as a result of his treatment the woman recovered. A few days afterwards, Wattia cured a child, and since that time his services have been much in demand. But to this day he cannot see the sickness or bring about the cures himself, this is the work of his manggata.

Credulity is the most potent factor in recovery, and it may 755 be safely surmised that most cases of sickness recover in spite of native treatment. Aborigines have far greater respect for the effectiveness of their own practices than for European methods, even though the latter may bring about dramatic cures and prevent death. I remember the morning a young infant was brought to me with scarcely a square inch of unbroken skin on its body. The wounds had the appearance of acid burns, and it seemed that the child had been sleeping near a fire where women had been roasting cashew nuts. I treated the child for acid burns, and in about a week's time there was a decided improvement. But on the morning the infant disappeared, I was told that the mother had gone into the bush with the child because it had been 'cured' by the local marrnggit. He claimed to have removed an octopus from inside the victim, and he explained his diagnosis to me as he waited at the dispensary for a dose of cough mixture for himself! He said that a large octopus had entered the child's stomach whilst the mother was

755 collecting shellfish, and to cure the child he had pummelled the stomach, subduing the parasite and sucking it out in an invisible form.

[164] A persistent epidemic of dysentery was making its way through the Yirrkala camp, and in desperation I finally dosed the two hundred occupants with castor oil, had all shelters burnt and a new camp made on the opposite side of the creek. There were no further applications for medicine, which suggested that everyone had recovered, and upon inquiry I was complacently told that there could be no further sickness, for on the night following the castor oil episode, the marrnggit had conducted a magical 'sing' and had put a spell on the mischievous spirit that had caused the trouble.

164 Aboriginal stamina in privation and suffering is pro-
152 verbial, and the wounded exhibit stoicism and endurance
beyond belief. Usually the only indication of suffering is in
the flexing of muscles and the rolling of the head. Internal
complaints, pains, and epidemics are much more likely to
prove fatal, for they cannot be seen as can an open wound.
753 Imagination plays a big part with internal troubles, and the
victim, thinking he is under an evil spell, prepares to die.

825 Yulengor have great fear of venomous snakes, and to show
their contempt for non-venomous and edible varieties they
insert the head upside down between their teeth and dis-
locate the vertebrae by jerking down with their hands.
In Arnhem Land there are two varieties of venomous brown
snakes in addition to the death-adder; although they are not
as numerous as might be expected, they are by no means
uncommon. One afternoon when I was burning a fire-break
round an eight-acre paddock I killed seven death-adders.
752 Snake-bite can only be treated by first capturing the snake.
755 A forked stick is held behind its head and is later replaced
825 by the string by which it is suspended from a tree. On no
account must the snake be killed, for if it is even injured the

victim will surely die. Hanging the reptile is part of the cure, 752
and it is thus held hostage for the life of its victim. If the man 755
recovers, the snake is released. It must not be killed even 825
after the man's recovery, for if it were killed the victim
would suffer a relapse and die.

Young Geitbapoi was bitten by a snake, and his mother saved his life by capturing the snake and hanging it in a tree. The snake appeared to be dying; the boy's condition also grew worse, and death was expected. But the snake passed a lot of what was said to be the boy's blood, and this was incontrovertible evidence of the reptile's recovery, and likewise its victim's. Therefore the snake was released, and in an hour or so the youth stood up and walked.

Power to kill by magic belongs to an evil witch-doctor 754
known as a 'raggalk', who waylays the man and causes a 752
deep sleep to fall on him so that he may squeeze blood out of his heart. Despite this, the victim lives an ordinary life till the raggalk decides to finish his work by sending a snake to bite him. As with ordinary snake-bite, the raggalk's victim tries to find the snake, to effect a recovery, but such a search is never successful, for the raggalk whisks away his instrument of death. For this reason, when a snake cannot be found after it has bitten someone, the injury it has inflicted is attributed to a raggalk. A marrnggit, or benevolent
witch-doctor, can prove that a man has been bitten by a [756]
raggalk-snake by lighting a small smoke-fire, seating the [787]
man near it and blowing the smoke over him through a hollow pandanus palm-stem. In the curling smoke he sees the spirit of the raggalk emerging from the victim; he announces the name of the killer, and adds that nothing can save the life of the man.

Scorpions, stingray, and jellyfish are numerous, but their 752
stings, though extremely painful, are seldom fatal. Scorpions
attack women as they dig for yams among the stones on [136]
hillsides, and it is said that the groin or arm glands swell

752 painfully when a limb is stung. They apply a counter-irritant in the form of a string ligature above and below the wound. Further treatment is given by lighting a fire on wet sand and applying the heated sand to the spot. A third popular theory is to catch the scorpion and squeeze its body juices over the wound.

[136] Stingrays in warm northern waters vary in size from twelve
inches in diameter to several feet. I well remember the night
when we were two miles off-shore in a canoe and were
startled by the splash of a huge black monster surging from
the sea some twenty or thirty yards away. Waves from its
crash tossed the canoe, and the boys did not allow closer
inspection, but madly plied their paddles, for fear of an
attack. A wound from an ordinary stingray is extremely
painful, and I have known the poisoned barb to be driven
through the thickest part of a man's hand. A black wood-
[825] beetle, like a cockroach, forms the basis of the cure, and is
squeezed into the wound; later, several of the beetles are
pulped and plastered over it. In serious cases the plaster is
mixed with the crushed tubers of a trailing vine from the
sand-dunes. Simpler and speedier relief is obtained by
applying hot moist sand.

[136] [165] [152] The Portuguese man-o'-war is well named, and is the worst variety of jellyfish in the Arafura Sea. It has caused the deaths of many children. Youths normally able to bear excruciating pain fall on the beach and scream in agony after brushing against a Portuguese man-o'-war. Its long trailing feeler, invisible in sea-water, carries many small cells charged with poison darts on springs. Delicate triggers hold these in position, so that once the feeler touches an object, the triggers automatically release their paralysing darts. Small fish are paralysed and drawn up to be consumed. Feelers can be quickly rubbed off the body with sand, and probably the Yulengor treatment of applying hot sand does this and also affords some slight relief.

Sharks attack nomads, and inflict shocking injuries; 752
crocodiles crush arms and legs. Bad wounds from these [136]
sources are treated with yellow hibiscus bark beaten into a
pulp and applied every few days. In the case of bone-
fracture, a few thick grass stalks are bound on as splints, and [824]
the hibiscus pulp is applied on the outside. The bark pulp
is left on a wound till the pain and odour demand attention,
and then both splints and pulp are renewed.

Even a simple break in a bone probably knits crookedly; when a compound fracture is suffered, if gangrene does not kill the patient, pieces of bone work their way out of the limb. Wounds become so painful, that further applications of the irritating grass and bark cannot be borne, and they are then left to Nature to flood and cleanse them with copious streams of pus. I saw one hunter who had sustained a compound fracture above the wrist from a crocodile. After a long course of Yulengor treatment, six inches of his forearm bone had dropped out, and the wound had healed. But thereafter he was unable to control his hand, and it flapped uselessly by his side.

An adult with a stubborn open sore will search at low tide 757
for a large anemone, and place the sore in the centre of the [825]
soft mass. The anemone automatically contracts, and the
patient then tears himself away and has a new, clean,
bleeding wound which may heal without further treatment.
A child suffering from stubborn sores is treated by its mother,
who collects slug-like shellfish (*Onchidium*) and squeezes [825]
the juices into the sore. I am told that the juices cause a
stinging sensation, as iodine does.

Back injuries are ineffectively treated by tying bush rope 752
tightly round the body in the region of the pain, and intense
pain is eased by applying hot wet sand. 'Charlie Sitdown'
became paralysed from the hips down, but his misfortune
did not prevent him from becoming influential and astute
in his dealings. In time he obtained three or four wives and

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AN AVERAGE FAMILY
Yulengor at their evening meal

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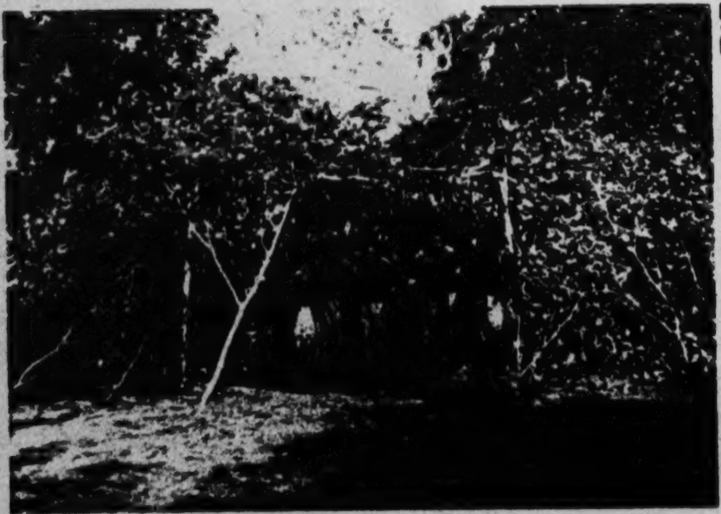

TOTEMIC DANCE
Yulengor carry the totem or maraian from its bush shelter

[facing p 86]

752 a family, and I have known him to roam by canoe for as far as one hundred and fifty miles with his wives, children, and dogs.

Women and children receive extensive fire burns; infants turn over in their sleep and roll into the fire and are shockingly injured. I saw one child's foot burnt so that the top of it grew along the shin, and the toes were missing. Another man had rolled into the fire and had burnt the skin off half his abdomen, and in the prolonged healing process the skin had formed a natural pouch, of considerable dimensions, in which he carried tobacco.

Burns are sometimes immersed in brine from evaporating
tidal-salt-pans; a far less painful method, however, is to
squeeze into the wound the moisture from the decaying
[824] swamp-rush, 'rarkai', and bind on the rotting pulp. Less
severe burns are smeared with glutinous sap from an orchid
stem, which seems to provide a temporary, flexible skin.

[578] Camp quarrels and head-splitting go together, but blows which would kill a white man merely crack the skull of Stone Age man. It is said that when the skull is wounded in several places, one operator grasps the head in his hands and presses it firmly together, and another binds it with string.

Before treating abdominal spear wounds a patient is
examined to see that his vital organs are intact. A freely
bleeding wound is allowed to congeal of its own accord,
but if the blood continues to flow or spurt a flat wooden
spear-thrower is heated in the fire and thrust into it. I do
not know if this is intended to cauterize, but many tributes
[824] are paid to the method. Hot water is poured into the opening
and yellow hibiscus bark-pulp is plastered over it. At the
end of three days the plaster is removed, the bark of two
other trees is mixed with the hibiscus and inserted in the
wound, and white clay is plastered over the poultice. If
intestines protrude from a wound, a test is made to see if they
are pierced. Water is given to the patient, and if none runs

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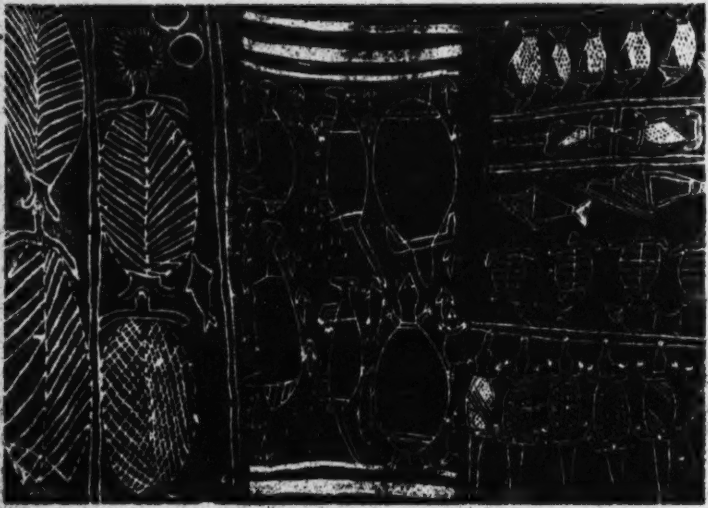

BARK PAINTINGS

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A WITCH DOCTOR
or 'Marrngitt'

[facing p87]

out it is assumed to be worth while patching him up; his 752
organs are pushed inside and the hot spear-thrower, bark-pulp, and clay-plaster treatment is applied.

Severe constipation, with distended stomach, is known as 757
'or wah', and for this the leaves of a dry jungle tree are mixed [824]
in water and the fluid rubbed over the body. Crushed leaves are inserted in the nostrils and piled on the chest whilst the remaining fluid is poured into the ears. It is said to be essential for the patient to remain supine, so as to allow the fluid to run from the nostrils and ears down through [826]
the spinal column into the stomach. A second method is to make a meal from a long, spiral shellfish (*Cerithieder Telescopium telescopian*) found on the mudflats. It is good food at [825]
any time, but it is also regarded as a cure for constipation, in [262]
aiding the passage of fibrous foods; it has the smoothness of the oyster and looks like glutinous slime.

A third treatment is carried out by building a low plat- 757
form of sticks, covering it with swamp grass, placing the 372
patient on top and covering him with sheets of paper-bark. A fire is made under the structure from the wood, leaves, and bark of the 'boit' or iron-wood tree. This particular tree is always used for the fire. (It is the hardest wood I have seen, and when it is being milled severe irritation is caused [313]
to both nose and throat.) The patient spends most of the day on the grille, and from time to time is turned over; at sundown he is removed and plunged into a nearby creek or waterhole. Most assuredly he can expect to feel stimulated.

Diarrhoea is not a common ailment, for natural wandering 757
habits reduce the danger of infection. Nevertheless, epi- [164]
demics do occur, maybe through over-eating a good catch of turtle, or through hunger driving the food-gatherers to [262]
eat decomposing fish or meat washed ashore. A succulent herb, 'brokpili', found near fresh water swamps, is then [824]
crushed and mixed with water, and the rusty red mixture

757 [824] is swallowed, poured over the body, and into the nose and ears. It is said to be a purgative.

752 Toothache is unusual, for teeth are strong and well developed and are constantly exercised in masticating tough meat and fibrous foods. It was explained that if a tooth were to ache so badly that a kangaroo catch could not be eaten, the tooth would be treated, to temporarily quieten [824] it for the feast, by packing around it shavings from the wood of the 'moinjortj' tree.

757 Severe coughs and colds are seasonal and are aggravated by dipping the patient in a creek or by pouring water over [824] him to ease an accompanying fever. Coughs are also treated by sipping a mixture from the inner-bark of the stringy-bark eucalypt and a sweet grass soaked in water. Nests of green tree-ants are dropped on hot coals to stupefy the insects so [825] that they can be collected and soaked in water. Their particularly high content of formic acid remains in the water, and the mixture is renowned as a cure for a cough. A further potion is made from the greenish, high-smelling wax in wild-honey nests, which is mixed with water. It is said to taste like certain patent cough remedies and to produce a mild stinging sensation in the throat. When colds have settled in the lungs, a fire is made from pandanus palm nuts and covered with leaves and wet sand; water is poured over the sufferer, and leaves and hot sand are piled on him. [753] It is said that the sickness is sweated out, and that the evil spirit 'jumps out of his mouth to escape the heat'.

Headaches seem to be due to constipation, and to relieve them a certain white-ant nest is taken from the mangrove trees and burnt on the windward side of the patient. After inhaling the smoke for a day, he is said to lose the pain, or, to put it more strikingly: 'The sickness escapes from the smoke through his eyes, nose and ears.' Finally, he washes himself with sand or water—and, as an old man naïvely suggested, after listening to my informant: 'He has a smoke.'

MEDICINE-MEN AND MAGIC

Faith-healing depends on an appeal to stars, water-spouts or Ancestors. If a man is wounded or ill he may appeal or 'sing' for help to a water-spout, for this is the only tangible link between the earth and the sky. If the appeal is successful, the water-spout sends a beam of light to shine on the sick man, and the light indicates that the water-spout has persuaded the man's ancestors to heal him. Ancestors later come in a dream and promise restoration, whereupon the man wakes up and says: 'I shall get better.' 755 821 [787]

An appeal may be made to a falling star, or 'larrpan', which sends a cool mist or fog over the patient to revive him, or if the star shoots through the sky and leaves a red trail it signifies that an Ancestor is on his way to heal the sufferer.

It may happen that a sick man is near his horde's totemic well; if so, he jumps into it and asks the mythical Snake to heal him. Though he cannot see the spirit of the Serpent, it comes out of hiding to lick him and restore him. If this totemic well is a long way off, a symbolical well may be scooped in the sand so that the sufferer can stand in it while water or sand is poured over him. His friends sit near by, singing the mythical story of Creation and calling on the Serpent for help. 755 [778]

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Arts, Crafts, and Camp-Songs

325 A STONE AGE hunter, in nature's garb, carrying a handful of hunting spears, stood looking at the sparks from my forge. He was in from the hills behind Caledon Bay, and pointing to a short length of metal lying by the anvil, he said: 'Please give me iron.' He wanted it for a spearhead. A week later I saw the finished weapon. With infinite patience he had pounded it with percussion stones and an old tomahawk, then ground and smoothed it till it had a razor-like edge and a surface with neither dent nor ripple.

Not having discovered the use of metals for himself, the nomad lives in the Stone Age; though why this should be so, when Australia is rich in ores, is another of the mysteries of this race. Tools-of-trade have not developed beyond the Stone Age; they are still chipped from stone, sharp shells, bone, and wood, and with these crude implements the nomads supply their simple needs of spears, dilly-bags, string, beautifully painted and decorated totems, armlets, waist-bands, and corselets.

325
177 However, these materials are now giving way to introduced metals. First knowledge of metal came in the seventeenth century, when European sailors visited the coast of Arnhem Land and brought aborigines into touch with metal weapons. Macassars, white traders, Japanese, adventurers, and missionaries have since visited this coastline, and of all their possessions the nomads prize most their knives, axes, and metal ware. Luggers have been raided and wrecks burnt for the metal in them. Trepang fishermen brought old railway lines to support fish-curing-boilers, and when these were later discarded it was not beyond aboriginal

ingenuity to cut and pound them into spear-heads, knives, 325
and digging-bars. The majority of spears in Arnhem Land 177
are now made from some kind of metal. Galvanized water- [411]
piping, and copper and brass fittings from wrecks, are pounded into shape; discarded fuel drums are beaten into knives and spears; nails from floating boxes are sharpened and bent into fishing hooks and harpoons.

Spears are frequently broken, lost, or given away, and 411
consequently nomads are always looking for new spear-hafts. At least twenty varieties are made from wood and stone;
the horror in primitive warfare is a spearhead made from a [237]
bunch of stingray barbs. Old-time fighting and hunting
spears are cut from twelve-foot strips of hardwood and are [322]
shaved and smoothed with shells and sharp stones. Spears are seldom naturally straight; the kinks are eliminated by passing them backwards and forwards through a fire. Later they are painted and stabbed upright in the sand beside a wind-break, where they are ready for instant use.

In emergencies spears are made very quickly from the simplest materials. I remember we had a rough trip in heavy seas and blinding rain, till we found shelter behind the Wessel Island, where the boys went ashore to hunt for food. Spears had been washed overboard, and I wondered how they intended to hunt. About dusk they returned with two stingrays and a small shark. I asked how they had caught them, and I was told simply: 'I dived and caught them in my hands.' When the fish were cooking on the coals, the young hunter turned his attention to a few rusty nails in a piece of driftwood; he removed them and straightened them in his teeth. He tied them to the end of a straight stick, and called it a spear. Next morning he caught four two-pound fish with his stick and nails.

Spears are thrown from a 'mangal' or spear-thrower, a

411 flat strip of wood three feet long and two to three inches wide. It is held between the second and third fingers so that the end of the thrower rests in the palm. At the opposite end there is a short hook, or pointed stub of hardwood, bound firmly in place with string and gum. The end of a spear is slightly concave, so that it fits over the hook on the thrower, which is then extended above and behind the shoulder for the throw. A man's thrust is greatly increased by the spear-thrower, and heavy and light spears are thrown with dangerous accuracy for distances of from forty to eighty yards; I have seen them thrown fifty yards and penetrate six inches into a tough palm tree. A nomad and his mangal are inseparable, and if by chance he loses or breaks his spear, or even finds it inconvenient to carry one, he always carries his spear-thrower. If a spear is unexpectedly thrown at him he has a good chance of throwing it back at his enemy if he has his spear-thrower.

531 Men use infinite care in painting and decorating themselves, their weapons, and utensils, and in ceremonial life they will spend weeks in making, painting, and decorating totems. Decorative art is limited by an unchanging
[778] background of mythology and religion, and sacred designs are
[428] passed from father to son to be meticulously reproduced
when preparing youths for initiation, or on corpses, skulls, and burial posts. There is little originality in ceremonial artistry, but nomads are not devoid of artistic tendencies and spend a lot of time in decorating weapons and utensils. A woman patiently weaves a dilly-bag and then sets about mixing coloured clays for its decoration; her aesthetic impulse is gratified, although the bag is not improved thereby. Youths decorate play-spears, and they cannot refrain from smearing designs on their bodies if they find moist clay
532 or soft ochre. Men paint pictures of animals, fish, and birds
on sheets of bark for pleasure, and when we took horses and

cattle to Yirrkala it was not long before their likeness too 532
appeared on bark sheets.

I saw little-known caves on the Wessel Islands, in which totemic myths had been painted side by side with Japanese pearlers, Macassar proas, and odd European wanderers. Rock paintings are common in many parts of Australia, except in Arnhem Land where outcrops of rock are so rare that only three lots of rock paintings have been found. Here the primitive artist uses a bark sheet, which in itself indicates some measure of aesthetic impulse, for it is not easily obtained and has no permanence.

The Serpent in sacred myths is spiritually present in the 778
'maraian' or log painted with totemic symbols. For cere- 531
monies, the maraian is kept in a bush shelter deep in the 796
scrub, and initiated men guard it till the moment arrives for its dramatic elevation. They push their way through the shelter toward the over-awed initiates, and grovel, shudder, squirm, and roll over and over with strained and contorted faces, as if overcome by dread of the long maraian so carefully borne across their bodies. Wriggling along in the rear, the leader of the ceremony blows through the maraian and produces the low booming sound so feared by women and children and believed to be the voice of the Serpent.

Designs on maraian are made from coloured clays, 386
string, and feathers. Hundreds of yards of string are wound 531
on some of them, and the effect is enhanced by weaving [778]
into it white birds'-down, red and green parrots' feathers, [237]
or opossum fur. Red ochre-stone from a totem centre on
Elcho Island is traded for hundreds of miles, and is in de- [438]
mand because of a greasy property which makes it adhere to [302]
the skin. Ordinary clay-paints crack and peel, but this
is overcome by crushing orchid stems and smearing the [824]
sticky juice over the body before applying the paint.
Participants in ceremonies decorate themselves with totemic 531
designs, and glue long lines of white birds'-down on their 301

531 bodies. This glue is obtained by cutting a vein in the arm, 301 painting the blood on the skin and adding feathers before it congeals. Paint brushes are made from human hair or 386 413 from twigs.

I remember watching Wonggu mix his colours in shells, flatten his bark, and prepare his orchid gum. Only then did he realize that he needed a brush, so he leaned over and cut a tuft of hair from his son's head, bound it to a twig and commenced his mural.

532 A well-known anthropologist stayed with us at Yirrkala and obtained a big selection of aboriginal arts and crafts [439] and bark paintings. He paid the Yulengor well, and they gave full play to their ingenuity, manufacturing such things [411] as bows and arrows which, incidentally, are not used by aborigines. I saw several paintings in the collection in the usual red, yellow, white, and black, together with an additional vivid blue. Not having seen blue before, I could not account for it till later in the day my wife chanced to remark that several of her blue-bags had disappeared.

304 Body decorations are made by mutilating the skin, and one pleasing mutilation resembles a string of beads on a woman's breast, where each bead is a raised nodule of flesh about the size of a pea. Women and girls sear a pattern on the skin with firesticks, and rub pipeclay into the wound; a more common practice is to cut the marks into the flesh before filling them with clay. For reasons of vanity and custom, a woman has a few cicatrices across her hips, and possibly on her shoulders, and in the event of sorrow she adds some to her midriff. If a brother should die, a sister [965] paints horizontal lines across the backs of her legs below the [302] knees, and when his bones are being collected she substitutes gashes for her clay markings.

It was explained that a man gets a friend to cut the customary perpendicular lines from his shoulder and halfway to his elbow, but he himself makes the more important

cicatrix across his chest. These raised shiny ridges stand out 304
like cords, and once they have healed they seem to cause no inconvenience. Clay is rubbed into the wound so that it will heal slowly, and the mutilated flesh becomes a raised ridge. Men with sufficient vanity treat any accidental wound in this manner, and produce broad, irregular raised areas and cicatrices over their bodies. The Stone Age warrior is proud of his cicatrices and regards them as a form of beauty. Burramurra told me that they are a sign of manliness, and added: 'When women see a man with rows of long thick [832]
cicatrices across his chest they are attracted by the glamour.'

Arm-bands are woven from split cane and string and are 301
adorned with opossum fur or birds' feathers; everyone seems [237]
to wear from one to a dozen of them. Cane armlets are the most common; they are tight fitting and are usually worn till they fall to pieces. Men's muscles swell round them; as children grow, armlets become so tight and painful that they chafe the skin and have to be cut away. Mothers and fathers decorate their children with armlets and string [751]
corselets, which are said to prevent illness and sores.

Vast quantities of string and rope resembling raffia are 283
made from the inner bark of several trees. Varieties include string as fine as cotton, fishing-lines, rope for turtle and dugong harpoons, and two-inch cable for mooring canoes. In the making of string it is a common sight to see an old man squatting in the sand and pulling the hairs off the inside of his thigh and then picking out three fibres of bark and spreading them on his hairless thigh. With a hand on the fibres he rolls them toward him and finally with a quick thrust of the wrist he reverses the action and rolls them forward, uniting them into a single string. Fresh fibre is added as required, till in about an hour fifty or sixty feet of uniform string is completed. Harpoon and heavy ropes are

283 made on the same principle. Three men each take a length of fibre. They twist them and pass them one to another to form a single length of rope. As the rope lengthens it is passed over the limb of a tree and held taut by a fourth man.

286 415 [237] [531] Woven pandanus dilly-bags are pleasing and effective examples of artistic workmanship. Sacred bags are small, but beautifully woven, and are adorned with parrot feathers or fur and sometimes totemically painted. Women make most of them and some are so closely woven that they hold water. The majority, however, are large work bags which hang down their backs and are used to carry yams, shells, roots, and small animals. Another bag is made from string, is similar to the well-known onion bag, and will hold thirty or forty pounds of yams.

292 285 293 [513] The curious 'nganmara' is peculiar to Arnhem Land. It is a house, an umbrella, a garment, a shelter from the wind and rain, a mat on which to sleep, and it is conveniently carried under the arm. This conical straw umbrella mat is woven from pandanus palm; it is circular, with an apex two feet high, and gives some slight protection from sun, wind, or rain. When the nganmara is thrown open on the ground a woman and child can be completely hidden under it. I first saw an nganmara when I was on the King River, where the woman who had it was hunting with her friends. When I asked her to show me the mat under her arm, she calmly handed me the nganmara, which was her only clothing. Knowing that strangers were in the camp, some of the women had politely donned leafy twigs, but this lady relied on her nganmara and deftly swung it from under her arm.

276 [237] In west Arnhem Land, tobacco pipes are made from large crab claws. More elaborate pipes are also made by boring the pithy centre from a soft jungle shrub and plugging

one end with bark. A hole is made in the side of the tube 276
for a piece of curved tin or a thimble to hold the tobacco.
Birds, animals, or men are sometimes carved or painted [532]
on the stem. As a special favour a man will promise a
pipe to a friend when it is worn out, and after months of [431]
constant use, when the pipe is saturated with nicotine, the presentation is made. The recipient proceeds to crush the frail tube and scrape its interior for the handful of nicotine shavings; other men gather, a pipe is filled with the moist shavings, and with a coal on top it is passed from one to another. It is customary to draw only once or twice, and everyone fills his lungs with smoke, holds it as long as possible and reluctantly exhales. The mixture is so strong that a whiff of it will cause coughing and the eyes to water.

Clap-sticks and drone-pipes, or 'didjery-doos', are the 534
only musical instruments known to Stone Age men. Drone-pipes are hollow tree-trunks, about four feet long and three inches in diameter, which have been eaten out by white ants. Men blow through them, and the low drumming sound can be heard from camps at night as the people join in the camp-songs. Clap-sticks, or short pieces of hardwood, are beaten together, and make a noise sometimes like the rat-a-tat of a
kettle-drum. Nomads are musically inclined; they will sing 533
from dusk till midnight for pleasure, and also in times of [765]
sorrow. Myths are transmitted and thoughts are expressed in song. Apart from songs with refrains, well-known theme-songs relate to Yulengor themselves, to camp-sites, sharks, the sea, rain, and canoes loaded with fish.

A 'camp-site' song has words and phrases fitted into the timing according to the fancy of the leader, and is interspersed by humming or the repetition of euphonious phrases. A song might go something like this:

'Coming to a camp' . . . 'men recline and await the women'
'Yanja, Wilama, Wirrwa', etc. (favoured camp-site names)

YULENGOR

533 'Footprints around the camp' . . . 'they soon wear a track'
'. . . . . . ' (many names for 'track' inserted here)
'. . . . . . ' (any pleasing words or phrases repeated)

Sometimes, when the drone-pipe and clap-sticks are finished, the soloist repeats a phrase and continues unaccompanied till he ends his effort with a flourish on a falsetto monotone. Method and treatment in each theme-song are left to the imagination of the soloist, and apart from two or three phrases, the song is of disconnected but suggestive key-words which may be changed each time the song is sung.

As the leader sings, he beats his clap-sticks for the timing of the song, and since each song has its own particular 'timing' others join in with clap-sticks without disturbing the rhythm. The drone-pipe, with its continuous drumming between two low notes, is known elsewhere in Australia by the appropriate name of 'didjery-doo', and if you repeat this name several times in a low monotone you will produce a fairly good imitation of the celebrated drone-pipe.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Aboriginal Temperament

ABORIGINES are light-hearted and enjoy fun and laugther. 152
Youths are for ever sky-larking and playing practical jokes, [522]
and in ceremonial pantomimes the men spend a lot of time
singing, dancing, and mimicking birds and animals. Intense 152
joy is also expressed through prolonged wailing, when women 201
rhythmically pound their heads with sharp stones and spear-heads till the blood flows freely.

Emotions lie close to the surface and without warning aborigines run through the gamut of them all. Some seem to be always weeping or wailing, but it would be wrong to imagine that they are a mournful or disconsolate race. To feel lonely for a son or daughter, temporarily in another part of the country, is enough to start a 'wail'. Others awake and join in for an hour or more before subsiding into sleep. When a family leaves camp the relatives will wail in loneliness for several nights, and so frequent are these wails that little attention is paid to them by the rest of the camp.

Twelve months after we landed at Yirrkala, the three boys
who had been arrested and jailed in Darwin for their part [648]
in the Japanese killings in Caledon Bay were repatriated to Yirrkala. Relatives surrounded them on the beach and took them to the camp, where they all sat in an uneasy silence till the women, overcome with joy, started to wail. Everyone joined in, and the deep passionate baritone cries of the old man and father of the horde throbbed through the wailing chorus of his sons' and sons' sons' families. Their welcome continued till dawn, with crying and blood-letting interspersed with camp-songs and dances.

YULENGOR

828 827 Stone Age man believes that his emotions are seated in his stomach, and his names for anger, fear, jealousy, and the rest, are descriptive of the changes that take place in the stomach in generating emotion. They make no distinction between anger, indignation, and jealousy; they are known as 'ngoi-mari-buna' ('ngoi' referring to underneath or the foundation), meaning the stomach boils.

[578] A man who refuses to support his relative in a quarrel is called 'ngoi kapumiri'; that is, he has a watery stomach (or as we should say in English 'no guts').

Pleasure, joy, and happiness are dependent on the stomach, which subsides into a peaceful calm on hearing welcome news. It was explained that when a man sees an enemy approaching, his stomach boils and his anger rises, but if the enemy says he has come to make peace, the man's anger disappears and his stomach subsides into a flat calm 'like the sea after a storm'; he has 'the wind taken out of his sails'.

Sorrow and regret also rise from the stomach. Fear comes from the same source, and rises and swells in the throat; Stone Age man also knows something about his 'heart in his mouth'.

[593] Love is dependent on the stomach, and the affection of a father for his son, or the devotion of mothers for their children, boils from the depths. I was reminded of the ageless biblical story of Joseph's meeting his treacherous half-brothers after many years; he was speechless, 'For his bowels did yearn for his (youngest) brother'.

152 It has often been suggested that aborigines have not the same highly developed affection for each other as white people, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Devotion is genuine, and intimate, and is openly expressed on scores of occasions which in a white community would call
304 for little more than passing sympathy. The first initiation
881 in a boy's life reaches its climax in circumcision, when wide-
[302] spread emotion is expressed. Women, girls, and children

of the hordes sit apprehensively under shady trees whilst the 304 881
men paint intricate totemic designs on the initiates. More [302]
often than not several hordes meet for the occasion, and all
the boys between eight and ten years of age are prepared by [628]
relatives. Armlets, dilly-bags and trinkets are hung around [301]
their necks for decorative purposes, and sometimes they
carry a knife or steel tomahawk. When their moment [411]
arrives, the boys are brought to the ceremonial ground, and
the men dance and sing with increasing emotion, till at last
they bunch together and with kindly reluctant movements
force each boy into the arms of a crouching man who supports and holds him. Women relatives close in and dance
around the tightly packed circle and wail in rising agitation,
others gash their heads, and girl playmates of the initiates
cry amongst the trees and cut their breasts with sharp shells.
An invitation is often extended to a visiting Yulengor to [574]
perform the actual operation, which is frequently prolonged
by the use of a stone knife or spearhead. The loud purposeful [152]
calls of the men seldom drown the cries of the victim. It is
then that a wave of emotion sweeps over the entire camp.

When a nomad is sick the relatives will crouch tightly 758
around him, and their excessively mournful sympathy is 152
conducive to moans and vapours from the patient. Eye-rolling and groans will accompany even simple sprains and
abdominal pains and inspire sympathetic cries and wails.
At the approach of death, the next of kin draw near pathetic- 763
ally brushing flies from the patient, attempting to sustain 758
warmth with sheets of paper-bark, but unwittingly stifling 152
him in a turgid atmosphere. There are wails and shrieks
if continuous movement is not seen from some part of the
body. Commotion at death is indescribable; women
deliberately hurl themselves on the ground with loud cries,
and they wail loudly and tremulously as they stab their
heads with sharp stones and shells.

Egyptians preserved mummified bodies in pyramids, 000

000 remains of national heroes are enshrined in notable monuments, a lock of hair is treasured, and thousands of square miles have been given over to fields of grave-stones. But the
765 Arnhem Land nomad preserves a memento of his dead by carrying the skeleton in a bark parcel. It is a pitiful gesture of affection, but the custom is not without ingenuity, for having no settled camp the nomad carries all his possessions with him. The bones of the largest skeletons are neatly wrapped in bark; they weigh only a few pounds, need no treatment, and are practically indestructible. In large camps it is an everyday occurrence for some mother to bring out the bones of a child and wail over them in company with other female relatives.

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155 Stone Age temperament is established in childhood. Nomads unwittingly foster the nervous and emotional characteristics in their children, who are spoiled and pampered even to the age of ten. Every whim is met, and mothers go to endless discomfort to fulfil their children's dictatorial demands. A woman returns to camp after a hard day's foraging; she is loaded with firewood, water, and food, and she also carries a child of four or five years of age until she is within a hundred yards or so of camp, when she exhaustedly puts him down to walk beside her. But instead of following her he throws himself on the ground, kicking and screaming tearlessly, till the mother's resolve is broken and she returns to bring him in. A favourite habit in soothing whimpering infants is to caress and pet their genital organs till fitful slumber claims them.

152 Primitive emotion is thinly veiled. Thoughts, desires, and feelings that are suppressed or camouflaged in civilized society are in aboriginal life given free play; they lie open for inspection and are accepted as natural phenomena. This unrestrained emotion does much to account for the frequent and unexpected changes in the Stone Age man's attitude, and for his alleged treachery.

ABORIGINAL TEMPERAMENT

Men of the Reratjingo horde one day met two Kalpu 152
youths with feigned friendliness, for both hordes shared the 628
same totem and had other interests in common. But, unbeknown to the Kalpu youths, a Reratjingo man had recently died and his death had been attributed to Kalpu [754]
magic. Both parties sat on the beach, and most of the Reratjingo men drew away, with studied insouciance, ostensibly to hunt, leaving two of their number to entertain the Kalpu youths. A plan for revenge was then hatched by the Reratjingo, and as they came back, they signalled to their two accomplices to spear the Kalpu men. As they drove in their spears the others rushed in and completed the massacre. Mortally wounded, the Kalpu victims asked and were told why they had been attacked. They protested that they knew nothing of the death-by-magic, and bore no ill-will toward the dead man or his horde; whereupon the killers to a man expressed genuine sorrow and regret for the attack. They commiserated to such an extent that their victims implored them to end their misery, and they obligingly did so.

In the early days at Yirrkala some boys and their dogs went to fish at Melville Bay, twelve miles away, and in the evening when the dogs returned without the boys, a prolonged wailing and commotion broke out in the camp and fighting spears were produced and brandished. I asked what it was all about, and was told that because the dogs had come back alone it was surmised that the boys had been ambushed and speared. Fighting men were noisily preparing to go after the hypothetical enemy until I suggested that the dogs could have come back for something to eat, and that possibly the boys had camped at the bay. The men agreed to wait until morning, and then the boys came home! It is hard to say what would have happened if they had gone out at night searching for enemies, but at least this much is certain—they would have satiated their emotions by

152 628 spearing any wandering nomad they may have chanced upon.

578 Camp quarrels are fiery and frequent, and everyone joins in on the slightest provocation. An imaginary slight, perhaps a small irregularity in food distribution, or the frequently [589] organized female attempts to annoy a bachelor by accusing him of making advances to married women, are enough to arouse resentment and inflame the emotions. Physical violence is usually preceded by a noisy battle of wit and the 578 exchange of abuse. Over forty commonly used abusive 195 epithets range from ingenious and witty references to male and female genital abnormalities to the calling into question of the integrity of parents, as well as that of future generations. It is also common to threaten to leave a man's bones to rot in the grave instead of removing them for decent [765] burial in a burying post; the formal curse is: 'May your bones rot before they can be lifted for interment.'

Every possible, impossible, and imaginary physical irregularity, ranging from the ludicrous to the obscene, is applied to the genital organs of both sexes, and all the references are shouted in the open camp. A favourite obscene remark is that an opponent's eyes, ears, and mouth are filled with placenta; a short abusive term accuses a woman of harlotry and describes fantastic intimacies on her part, whilst a man can have similar cryptic charges hurled at him.

Milder references are made to big eyes, knees, elbows, and sunken eyes; bones are said to be solid and lifeless like stone, and eyes and ears are described as blunt. Minor scornful phrases used by mothers to children include the impatient exclamation: 'Your fingers are thumbs'; arms and legs are said to be awkwardly long, the neck to be short, the head to be sitting on the shoulders.

578 Despite his emotional temperament, Stone Age man has artificial methods of arousing a display of temper. If he feels that he has been slighted and wishes to vent his grievances,

he waits till everyone has returned to camp, then he hangs 578
round his neck a string bag stuffed with feathers or bark; and biting on this, and shaking his head from side to side, and glaring fiercely and growling, he rushes out into the open camp. He brandishes his spears, and in a high, tremulously passionate monotone, he hurls defiance and abuse at his offenders. A biting-bag is considered to be an aid to stirring up anger and to impress the audience, but I must admit the practice and the facial contortions have always moved me to unseemly laughter.

Relatives and friends 'shadow' a disputant in every camp quarrel and make a show of stemming his emotions. They are not directly concerned in the disturbance, so they clasp their arms round the middle of the 'growling' relative to suggest that they are holding him back, and in serious cases they may even break his spears or deflect them before they can be thrown. More often than not these 'shadows' are there merely as a matter of form, to lend reality; they make a pretence of holding back the apparently angry, gesticulating warrior who seems to be struggling to get to his enemies. I have often wondered just how ludicrous a contestant would appear if he happened to break away, but they are careful not to struggle hard enough to do this. With amusing ingenuity Marupla, who had acquired a smattering of pidgin English from traders, rushed toward his 'illiterate' opponent waving a handful of spears. With a sidelong glance, to see that I was looking, he shouted in pidgin: 'Good thing white man here, you dead fella long time.'

Nomads cheerfully dice with death; they face it continually, and escape so barely, that their philosophy becomes 761
a cheerful fatalism. From childhood they look calmly into the face of death, so that its bitterness is past or at least reduced to such an extent that in time of excitement they [777]
regard almost certain death as a dangerous pleasure. Life is cheap, so cheap that a violent death to any but horde

761 relatives and friends is a matter of amusement. It is only possible to die once, and in the ageless wandering through the unbroken round of day and night, the Stone Age fatalist finds his highest form of excitement in continuing a feud, in
[721] raiding other hordes, and in other forms of violence, such as capturing women from another man—in itself a profitable pastime. A general raid is the *pièce de résistance*.

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[152] Nevertheless I found nomads to be happy and cheerful; they bear pain and disappointment and face death with extraordinary courage. Resilient natures find humour in a mundane primeval world, and they are always on the look-out for something to laugh at—even to the extent of being amused at the contortions of an expiring enemy or at a healthy man's imitation of physical disabilities in another. Youths and men are convulsed with laughter at the antics of a man aping the gait of a leper, and at the uncertain gropings of the partially blind. Jokes are very simple, and the average is no better than a jealous remark about an old man negotiating for youthful wives: 'He must be a turtle', the reference being to the fact that a turtle usually lays several dozen eggs.

157 Under all this rank growth of primitive emotion lie the roots of qualities we value most in civilized man; such as courage, kindliness, devotion, and honesty. Stone Age man
609 is ordinarily well intentioned toward the welfare of any white man or alien stranded in the bush, and countless stories are told of their rescue of them. In such circumstances they treat them as privileged invalids, and except when bad impressions have been made by previous visitors, they are accepted at face-value. If they act as gentlemen they are treated as such; but if they abuse the hospitality of their hosts, and attempt to rape the women, as has frequently happened, they are exterminated by the only law known to the nomad.

It is impossible to walk through the bush and not notice the nomad's continuous thought and consideration in 609 breaking branches, waiting at waterholes till the white man drinks first, breaking twigs for him to sleep on, and offering him the choicest parts of their scanty food. When the track has led through mangrove swamps they have paused on the edge of the mud and apologized for having led me into the mess; their solicitations have been embarrassing, and they have offered to carry me through the slime and tangled roots.

Early one morning two Yulengor left with me on a launch 123 to take medical aid to a horde about thirty miles from Yirrkala. Shortly afterwards the engine gave trouble, and after I had set this right a spark escaped from the magneto cable and ignited petrol fumes in the cabin and exploded the fuel. In a few moments the boat was hopelessly ablaze from stem to stern and we had to dive overboard to extinguish the flames on our limbs and clothing. We were then about a mile from a small rocky island and started to swim toward it, but my knees were badly burnt and I was floundering badly. The boys then closed in and told me to put a hand on either of their shoulders, and in this way they helped me ashore. One boy was uninjured and swam the channel to the mainland for a canoe in which we hoped to make our way home. Whilst he was away the other lad regaled me with stories of several fatal shark attacks, and casually remarked that while I had been tinkering with the engine they had watched a twelve-foot shark cruising round the launch. Aboriginal courage is of the highest order, and their loyalty and devotion are above question. They make [577] no parade of noble and unsuspected qualities, for they are among the natural attributes of the race and are accepted as a matter of course.

After a long patrol, Northern Territory troopers had 648 captured two troublesome nomads and were taking them to 577 jail, but when they were crossing a flooded creek the white men lost their horses and were carried downstream. The

648 577 nomads themselves reached the bank of the creek, but seeing the plight of their captors they unhesitatingly dived in again and brought them to safety. The incident made a wide appeal and was hailed as something new in the make-up of the aboriginal. Soon afterwards a well-known Territorian, who had been born and reared among aboriginals, was taxed with being unappreciative of their high qualities, and he expressed the nomad's usual attitude to these things by saying: 'What is all the fuss about? They are like that.'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Black Magic

STONE AGE man's credulity and dark dubiety lead to the 754 use of magic in everyday life. Specialized workers in evil magic are called 'raggalk', but astonishing powers are also credited to many men and women who claim to make wind and rain and to bring about the deaths of enemies. Aspiring raggalk are initiated by old witch-doctors, who do it for a consideration. The pupil is asked if he wishes to do a special killing or general training in all branches of black magic. When this nice distinction has been made the lesson proceeds.

A raggalk told me that both mentor and pupil search for 754 an unsuspecting Yulengor, whom the raggalk kills with a 826 spear-thrust between the ribs; he is killed in this particular way to simplify the draining of his blood. When the victim dies, the raggalk enlarges the wound and draws out the small intestines and buries them, meantime catching the blood in a bark container. Heart-blood is kept by the raggalk to assist him in hunting and to ensure health and good luck, and when he is making totemic emblems he swallows some of it to increase his skill. Such powers come from the lesser spirit of the victim, which is trapped in the blood and can be [774] controlled by the raggalk. Eventually however the raggalk makes the fatal mistake of relying entirely on this ghost to warn him of danger, and when a killing-party comes to avenge the death of the victim, the ghost deserts him and joins the avengers.

Raggalk say that when the blood and organs have been 754 removed, they wash and massage the body to arrest rigor-mortis and 'soften' it before bringing it back to life. To

754 accomplish this a spear-thrower is heated and repeatedly thrust into the wound to 'draw' the flesh together. Meanwhile the killers wait quietly till the greater-spirit of the victim creeps back from the bush, and as it enters the wound they quickly shut it in with a sheet of bark and plug the body vents to prevent its escape. Soon afterwards the body begins to move, and this is the signal for the young raggalk to climb into a tree; whereupon the raggalk calls on the spirits of his departed ancestors to help him restore life to the dead, and the victim rises to his feet. Sitting by his fire, the raggalk casually greets his resurrected victim: 'Oh, you are awake? I saw something hit you, I think it was a hawk, and then you went to sleep. It may be still in the trees, you had better look for it.'

The victim is completely in the power of the raggalk, and when he looks in the trees and sees the young raggalk, he thinks he sees a hawk and asks for a spear to kill it. But the old raggalk warns him that it is a man and that if he kills it he will die. This by-play is the signal for the young raggalk to come out of the tree and change back into a man. As the victim sees him he tries in vain to speak, but raggalk-magic has twisted his tongue, and to prove their control over him they ask him if he recognizes them. He replies absurdly: 'Yes, you are a crocodile and you a kangaroo.' Having no control over his speech proves that the magic has worked and that he will die. Taunting him still further, the raggalk tell him to return to his camp and to say that they have arranged for his death by snakebite, or by a shark or crocodile. It is believed that the victim attempts to tell his friends but never does so, for his tongue independently speaks of anything but raggalk magic. Meanwhile the raggalk escape to their own hordes, and in a day or so the victim feels ill and dies in his camp, or by the appointed snake or shark.

Raggalk are self-appointed; when an enemy dies, an
[628] aspiring raggalk will often claim to have killed him. At

times an innocent tribal-enemy is accused of having become 754
a raggalk to cause the death, and more often than not the [628]
accused openly admits the allegations, and though he be
constantly pursued by the avengers he glories in his spurious
notoriety.

Simpler magic known as 'borrpoiyuma' is brought to bear on a victim through his personal possessions, footprints, or excreta; anyone may practice the art without special training. A victim is spied on till he is seen to drop sweat, spittle, or urine, and his enemy lights a fire over the spot to heat the sand. The victim receives this heat in his abdomen and dies by slow torture. Should he realize that
his trouble is due to evil magic he may counteract it by [755]
finding the fire and throwing water on it. In the case of ordure, the witch-doctor deposits it in a fire in a circle of stones, and a large flat stone and sand are packed on top to make an oven, which is left untouched for one or two moons. By that time the curse has worked and the victim has died in agony from pains in his stomach.

A Blue Mud Bay nomad made a gift of armlets to a man from the Wessel Islands. Months after the gift had been made the Blue Mud Bay man developed sores on his arm and attributed them to the visitor's evil magic, and it was said that he caused them by throwing the armlets into a fire. In this instance the magic did not prove fatal, for the victim stemmed it by pursuing his 'enemy' and spearing him! Dilly-bags, pubic shields, or belts impregnated with sweat, are also means of contact between a witch-doctor and his prey. When a woman went blind for no apparent reason, it was surmised that her dilly-bag had been stolen and burnt. Her normal good health was evidence that magic had been
used against her, but because she was a woman it was not [562]
worth while to search for the evil worker.

Injuries may be inflicted by burning an enemy's waste

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754 food in fire made from a certain shrub; as the heat increases his throat swells till he dies. The trouble can be cured only [755] by finding the fire and pouring water on it. If a spear or spear-thrower is broken and burnt, the owner's hands become crippled and twisted by rheumatism. A saccule or bark drinking-cup also provides means for injuring the one who drank from it, for if a pronged fish-spear is stabbed into it the victim's throat swells till he dies. Maleirpa the leper had lost most of his fingers and toes long before his misfortune was attributed to magic, but someone idly recalled that, years previously, Bulambi had followed Maleirpa's footprints along a beach and had aimlessly dropped the point of his pronged fish-spear into them. Obviously Maleirpa's toes had dropped off in consequence. As the victim did not die immediately, Bulambi was not [683] killed, but when the afflicted one finally succumbs, Bulambi will need to make restitution to his next-of-kin by the gift of a canoe, an axe, or spears. Meanwhile Bulambi, the leper, and his brothers fraternize and hunt happily together.

789 787 'Nyirrah' is specialized magic connected with the making of wind and rain, the poisoning of food before it is eaten, and the controlling of a woman's desires so that she can be made to desert her husband and follow the man of Nyirrah. Such magic comes to a man in a dream, by instruction from another Yulengor or by direct bestowal from the Nyirrah spirit-centre. When the body is asleep human spirits are free to roam and converse, and then a spirit with Nyirrah powers [794] may invite another to see him kill a man or make rain. A [778] more direct method is to go inland to a mythical tree from which Nyirrah powers are dispensed. Approaching the tree the man hears the beating of clap-sticks, and their very invisibility proves that spirits inhabit the tree. If he is brave enough to go nearer Nyirrah will automatically come upon him.

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Our pedal-radio had broken down, and Mau and four 789
other men took an urgent message for me to Milingimbi, a 684
hundred and fifty miles away. It seemed that whilst he was there he was seduced by a married woman who came to his camp at night and told him to prepare the canoe whilst she collected the paddles. They made their get-away with no one the wiser, but next morning footprints and the missing canoe told the story. Two months later Mau and the woman came ashore at Yirrkala, and in the subsequent disputes and negotiations by the husband to regain his wife, Mau's horde stood firm, and Mau kept the woman. I was told that I had misinterpreted the incident, and that the woman had no active part in the elopement, for Mau had cast a Nyirrah spell over her, and her apparent enticement had all the time been inspired and controlled by him.

All rain is attributed to human agency, and heavy storms 821
are invariably claimed by some wily magician. Distant 789
clouds often lead to the casual remark that a horde living many miles in that direction is making rain. When I asked why they did not make rain to fall in the dry season, to cool the burning atmosphere and to make the yams grow, I was told that it is never made at that time of the year because they want the grass to die so that they can hunt kangaroos and emus. To my suggestion that regular showers would help the station garden crops, they replied that the garden did not need rain when the irrigation plant was pumping thousands of gallons over it.

Actual rain-making is a simple matter, but it depends 821
entirely on the will and discretion of the magician. By one 825
method, he kills a snake, and leaves it till putrefaction sets 789
in before hanging it in a tree. He takes the spirit of this reptile, sings his instructions to it, and sends it into the sky to make rain. Thunder accompanying the storm is the voice of the growling snake, and lightning flashes are his flickering tongue. Wind preceding the rain is due to the snake rolling

821 the clouds together and pushing the wind before them in the
825 way that water spreads out before a rolling stone. As he
789 labours the snake weeps copiously and his tears fall as rain.
If a snake is not available for rain-making, a bundle of grass
may be tied together and submerged in a waterhole. Instructions
are sung to this before its immersion, whereupon
[776] the great Spirit who made the world and at times revealed
himself through the mythical serpent, assumes the functions
of the missing earthly reptile and sends the rain.

In west Arnhem Land another mythological serpent
[184] sends rain in response to aboriginal wizardry. He shows
himself as the rainbow, and thunder is the rumbling of his body as he turns over to urinate in the form of rain. To impress his admirers with his strength, Umbij hits two stones together till they flash fiery lightning.

821 If an old man is offended at some slight in the wet season
789 he will threaten to send a storm. All day Munju had been
888 mumbling and scowling at the door of his shelter, but his
temper improved considerably toward sundown as nimbus clouds gathered to the accompaniment of distant thunder. That night a fierce tropical storm swept over the island, trees were struck by lightning, thunder crashed, and the wind howled as it levelled trees and shelters. In the sparkling stillness of the following dawn, the sun rose over a subdued camp, where Munju's honour had been vindicated, and he accepted the homage of his contemporaries. Also in the
[302] stormy wet season I heard a noisy termagant at Yirrkala
objecting to young women cutting their hair, and when they
[578] persisted she threatened to call up a storm. That night we
had heavy rain and a strong wind, and next day old Bamaja's exploit was referred to in subdued tones. Like most rain-makers she was aged, and having lived in the open air for sixty years with no other shelter than a sheet of bark, she knew her weather and could make a fairly accurate forecast.

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There are no direct methods for stopping a storm, and it 123
is taken for granted that the rain continues as long as the 789
rain-maker wills it. If fine weather is desired it is necessary 821
to intimidate the rain-maker. During protracted stormy weather I developed acute appendicitis, and as the wireless transmitter had been shattered by lightning, we were unable to get medical assistance till five Yulengor, including Mau, volunteered to make a hazardous open-sea trip to the nearest pedal-wireless station one hundred and fifty miles away. Day after day the storms and high seas continued and the canoe was hardly expected to get through. From the time the boys left till the flying doctor arrived, Jirring, who was particularly attached to me, sat by his camp-fire significantly grinding his axe and muttering threats against the misguided rain-maker who had not only manufactured the storms, but now obstinately allowed them to continue.

Another kind of magic belongs to certain localities and 754
it is necessary to perform certain rites at these magic-centres. [778]
An old gnarled tree in the Wessel Islands shelters the spirits [776]
of octopuses, and peculiar rock formations near Cotton Island are also octopus-spirit centres. If a nomad wishes to harm another he visits either site and instructs a spirit-octopus to enter the victim's body, in an invisible form, or to change into a fish which the victim will catch and eat to his destruction. Two men from Arnhem Bay were killed in the course of a long feud, so their mother went to an octopus centre and sent a spirit to spoil her enemies. She told the octopus-spirit to travel into enemy territory and there change into a large shell-back turtle, to float near the shore, and to remain inactive till caught and eaten: 'And when they eat you, you kill them,' she said. About that time the unfortunate enemy chanced to harpoon an outsize turtle near Port Bradshaw, and ate all they could, without paying attention to the poison glands. Within a few hours

754 several women and children were dead; other sufferers were retching, and rolling on the beach in agony.

When an epidemic of whooping cough from Darwin swept
[164] eastwards through Arnhem Land and caused many deaths, a horde on the Crocodile Islands explained that an enemy
[776] had released the curse from a tree containing the spirit of the common cough. By stripping the bark from the tree he uncovered the evil spirit and sent it to the camps of his enemies to afflict them. On the other hand he could have broken up the tree, burnt it, and sent the smoke to blow over them.

754 Old Manimba, lame and half-blind, was familiar with
753 magical arts and an acknowledged rain-maker. He also
789 claimed to have control over mosquitoes and boils. Spirits
825 of both plagues inhabit the pandanus palm, and when these
[776] prickly fronds drop off in the wet season the mosquito and boil spirits are released to swarm over the land. Manimba usually gets what he wants by threatening to send some sort of plague. To rouse unseasonal mosquitoes he pulls a green pandanus frond and instructs its mosquito-spirit to swarm into the country of his enemies, and it is done. He can call up boils by making a fire under the palm and directing the smoke to blow over and inflict certain camps.

754 Death in any but the very young or old is attributed to evil
761 magic and the first consideration is to fix the blame, for
787 someone must die for it. When a man is killed his lesser
[775] spirit follows the killer. Marrngeit, or benevolent witch-
[756] doctors, claim to be able to see these enslaved ghosts, and they are called on for an opinion. They sometimes make startling revelations to the relatives, though not always without serving their own ends. I remember one marrngeit acted on his own initiative, and asked the relatives: 'Do you know why your brother died?' And when interest and suspicion were fully aroused, he continued, 'I have seen his "mali". It is following Jimunboi, and he must

have killed him.' At other times the marrngeit is called to 754
examine the body and reconstruct the crime, for by his 761
supernatural powers he can see the marks of the alleged 787
wound, and by sleight of hand he pulls it open to prove his case. He can see the ghost of the killer lurking near the victim's body, or if the body has been disposed of he can still name the killer by an examination of the victim's armlet, spear, or footprints.

Birrinjauwoi of Milingimbi died from pleurisy and was buried before a marrngeit could be brought to examine him. His ornaments and personal possessions were therefore put aside for the autopsy, but when a trickle of moisture came from the lips of the corpse it was hailed as the best specimen of all and was taken to the marrngeit. This marrngeit was a wise man and talked to them and asked questions till he felt sure of their feelings, and then dramatically named the 'killer'.

A youth was killed somewhere in the hills behind Blue 628
Mud Bay, and within three days we heard of it from messen- 765
gers who ran with the news to us at Yirrkala. They called on the relatives to organize a revenge party, and personal possessions from the corpse were shown and small parts of his flesh distributed. In the emotion which flamed through the country, wailing women incited their men to vengeance. I was reminded of the biblical story of an ancient Hebrew tribe which received parts of a body that had been carved up and sent amongst them to cry for vengeance, and they swept over the hills of Palestine to exterminate a related horde.

Relics from a dead man are known as 'maiyabala', and consist of finger joints, small bones, fragments of the spear embedded in the body, dried blood, skin, flesh, hair, or ornaments. They are given to relatives as reminders of their
obligation to exact blood vengeance and by the very accept- 774
ance of them the pact is sealed. A victim's lesser spirit 789
765

774 accompanies the maiyabala to assist in locating and
789 killing the murderer. Maiyabala are often carried in the
765 mouth, in totemic dilly-bags, or rolled in bees wax and tied round the neck. They give extra strength and skill to the wearers and guide them to the enemy, who, in turn, is made unwary and tired.

765 Raiwola told me that he had accepted such a maiyabala
628 but for years his vow remained unfulfilled. Then one day after a long kangaroo hunt in the rain he stood warming himself by a fire with several other men, amongst whom chanced to be the killer of his relative. Without a word Raiwola plunged his spear into him, and in reply to the astounded questions of the huntsmen, he produced his maiyabala as proof that it had been done in settlement of the old debt.

726 It is rarely left to one man to avenge a death, for in the
628 heat of emotion that follows a killing the relatives go in a body to exact vengeance. Killing-parties are known as
[201] 'merringor', and their appropriate sign in the sign-language is wiping the open palm down over the face to suggest their ruthlessness in wiping out men, women, and children. In feverish passion, and with maiyabala and totemic dilly-bags slung from their necks, merringor lose all fear and travel relentlessly till they are lean and exhausted. They daub their
[302] bodies with white clay, a practice which plainly indicates their intentions, they creep silently on their enemies, and with wild yells they hurl their spears into the sleeping groups. Such raids are seldom bloodless, and more deaths result from these attacks than from all other forms of violence.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Burial Rites and Cannibalism

DEATH and burial customs are much the same from one end 184
of Arnhem Land to the other. Bodies are artistically painted 764
and decorated before they are buried or exposed on platforms 765
or in trees. Later the bones are collected and hoarded
by relatives till they feel disposed to deposit them in decorated
burial posts. In one district bones are removed from the
body and parts of the flesh are eaten in an effort to form a [266]
link with the dead. This ceremonial cannibalism is confined
to three or four hordes, but all Arnhem Land nomads
attempt to communicate with their dead and call on them [769]
for assistance.

Mau's young son slipped from an overhanging tree, and 761
in falling into the water struck his head on a canoe. No one
saw the accident and he was not missed till his body drifted
downstream to the beach. Two youths carried the corpse [775]
to the camp, but by coming into contact with it they had
attracted its spirit or 'mali', which lodged in their skin.
Before they dared to eat any food they must needs free [262]
themselves from the ghost by smearing red-ochre on their [302]
arms. [983]

That night the entire camp of several inter-related hordes 764
combined in a ceremony conducted by the child's grandfather. 775
Alternately he wailed and sang a prayer to the
spirit of his dead brother, the child's tribal grandfather,
asking him to come and take the young spirit to the spirit
world of 'Buralkor'. The camp set about preventing the
spirit or mali from haunting them, and drove it from the
camp by switching their bodies with heated leafy twigs.

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764 Next day the grandfather painted totemic symbols on the body, and women relatives wailed and gashed their heads. About a mile from the camp the child's tribal 'grandsons' constructed the exposure-platform for the body, a very simple structure consisting of forked sticks to support the platform five feet high. Beneath it they scooped a depression so that anything falling from the dissolution might be easily buried.

In the late afternoon everyone gathered about this [535] platform. Relatives danced and the women wailed and performed their characteristic body-swaying and rhythmical shuffling from one foot to the other. A tribal 'grandson' climbed to the platform to arrange the body and covered it with leaves, twigs and bark so that birds could not disturb it. As this was nearing completion, the grandfather burst into a wailing dirge, calling on the spirits of his father and brother to come and take the child to the spirit-land. The child's father and uncles also danced toward the platform, urging the young spirit to depart for Buralkor.

765 At the end of four days we went back in the early morning for the bones of the child. Men sat in one group, and women in another, near the body, on the crest of a sand dune overlooking a wide billowing jungle which fell away toward the leaden, hazy sea from which the sun was rising. To the accompaniment of a desultory singing-wail, the platform was lowered and the tribal 'grandsons' collected the bones. A breeze blowing in from the sea left no doubt about the state of the body, and a concerted move was made to scratch together fallen eucalypt leaves, which the women lit with firesticks. The resulting pungent aroma of burning gum leaves was very welcome. Actual dismemberment was realistic enough; bones and joints were raised and beaten with sticks until separated into lengths suitable for wrapping in bark bundles. Refuse, twigs, and bark were dropped into the depression under the platform, and the heavy forked

sticks were pulled out and thrown on the heap to deter 765
inquisitive dingoes.

Meantime the grandfather sang songs appropriate to the 765
departing spirit, the most important being the plover song. 533
A plover is a spirit from Buralkor disguised with feathers so 825
that mortals may see it, and its purpose is to guide human [775]
spirits on their way to the spirit world. Native-companions,
geese, jungle fowls, and cockatoos are similarly revered by
the Yiritja moiety, except that they have no qualms about
eating them. Moreover, these are genuine birds and not
visible spirits like the plover. Their importance lies in their
supernatural ability to see spirits and to assist them.

As the grandfather sang the bird-songs, his sons accom- 765
panied him with clap-sticks and women danced and 535
made the bird-signs. For the plover they held their hands 201
in front of their shoulders with the fingers half clenched 825
like talons; this gesture is also used ordinarily in their
sign-language to indicate death, a corpse, or wandering
ghost. Geese were introduced by imitating their cries and
by holding short sticks between the hands for bird-perches.
Long-winged native-companions could not be mistaken
when the dancers extended their arms and flapped them.
At the end of the ceremony a tribal-mother carried the bones 765
to her camp and deposited them in the fork of a tree; in
bush-camps such parcels can be seen in trees or in forked
sticks. Skulls are of more importance and are painted and
hoarded for as long as ten years.

It is usual to expose infants and to bury older children and [766]
adults, though no particular significance is attached to either
method and both are preliminaries to the collecting of the
skeleton. A corpse is buried in a shallow grave face down-
wards to facilitate the removal of the bones by lifting the [764]
backbone to which the greater part of the skeleton is at-
tached. Bones may be collected in four or five days, a week
or several months after burial, depending on the regard the

765 horde had for the deceased. In decimated hordes, and in the
case of aged and unwanted wives, I have known bodies to
be left in the ground and no attempt made to remove
them.

775 Until bones have been collected and a mother is
783 'purified' she remains smeared with red-ochre and leads an
765 inactive life. Relatives feed her and carry water from the
[302] well so that she will not desecrate it, for her child's ghost
hovers near her and may attach itself to anything she handles.
Similarly the relative who dismembers the body is tabu
because of the ghost lodging in his skin, and he also is barred
from waterholes and from feeding himself and becomes
dependent on the hospitality of the family of the corpse.
They are expected to treat him well even to the extent of
[431] making presents in return for the favour he has done
them in attending to the corpse and running the risk of
absorbing the ghost. Consequently there is no difficulty
in getting 'grandsons' to run these risks, and the father not
infrequently declines several offers and even limits the
number of morticians to two or three.

783 This final purification ceremony is similar to the 'mum-
765 bakuta' described in Chapter 5. Food is deposited in a
totemic well conveniently scooped in the sand, and from this
[264] a ceremonial meal is eaten by the victims of the tabu and
by certain near relatives. Waste food is piled into the well
and burnt, to prevent dingoes disturbing it, and the tabu
is finally lifted and the ghost removed when the relatives
heat leafy twigs in a fire and switch their bodies. Al-
ternatively, water or sand may be poured over the 'unclean'
as they stand in the totemic well and smear themselves with
red-ochre.

761 All deaths are regarded with a certain amount of suspicion,
754 but the death of an active warrior is always attributed to
sorcery. In such case the body is left in the ground for a very
765 short time before the bones are collected. Smaller ones are
[766]

given to relatives, and by accepting them they pledge themselves to avenge the death of their kinsman. Bones are also 765
worn as hunting-charms; the ghost follows the bone and
guides the wearer to good hunting. Skeletons carried in [789]
canoes or sheltered in huts transfer their ghost to anything
they touch, and rarely are they allowed to come into contact with private property. [775]

Tabus are lifted by switching away the ghost with smoking 784
twigs. This common 'muntja' ceremony is performed 775
whenever news of a death reaches a camp, perhaps months 765
after it has occurred, otherwise the roaming, mischievous ghost might haunt them indefinitely. Men are most particular in taking part in the ghost-laying practices, otherwise
the ghost would trail them when hunting, and as animals [825]
can see these spirits it would not be possible to stalk and spear game.

An accepted etiquette is observed in breaking news of 763
death. With an air of mystery the messenger imparts his information to two or three of the older men, and often it is ten or twelve hours before they divulge the news in open
camp. I saw a man bring such news and tell it by signs [261]
to a few old men who agreed to keep the secret till they arranged the ghost-placating ceremony, and no one heard about it till the coterie commenced to sing for the unmistakable 'muntja'. Performers then derived great satisfaction from the furore; the rest of the camp ran to inquire about the death and to join in the laying of the ghost.

Dead nomads' names are never repeated, though reference 551
to them can be made by signs or by relationship terms. If
the restless ghost heard its old familiar name it would probably lodge in the camp or in the body of the person using [775]
it. A nomad with a dead man's name will change it or be referred to under a class-name. A little girl, Milly-milly, had her euphonious name changed to Arrung-giddy-niddy after the death of an older Milly-milly. The child appreciated

551 the distinction, and when I forgot the new name and used the old one she remained naïvely silent till correctly addressed.

775 Appropriate names are given to wandering ghosts, though 'mali', 'morquoi' and 'warru' are the most comon. Mali [192] and morquoi are also used for reflections in water or in a mirror, and warru is applied to any shade or shadow. Ghosts roam at will, hunting and fishing, gathering yams and cooking them; strange events, unaccountable fires, a falling tree, and unrecognizable footprints can all be attributed to mali. At times a mali deserts a skeleton and hovers round a mother's camp, and should she find that her food has disappeared, she is happy in the belief that her dead child's shadow came to her when hungry.

'Birrimbirr' is the second spirit found in every individual. [774] Birrimbirr come from the spirit world of Buralkor, and at death relatives urge them to return there. Irrespective of the life lived on earth, birrimbirr return to Buralkor, and good and bad spirits live there in hordes as they do on earth.

[776] [821] Buralkor lies beyond the rising sun and is the home of the Great Spirit who sent out the first creative Ancestresses. The sun comes from the spirit land and goes back again each night to suckle her infant. On its flight to Buralkor a spirit first sees a cloud rising from the sea and later it resolves itself into a dense jungle with every leaf holding a sparkling dewdrop. On approaching the trees, the birrimbirr finds an opening, and a plover guides it through the branches to the camp of its horde's spirits, where it is welcomed and it settles down to a happy life of hunting. Birrimbirr are able to see what is taking place on earth, and from time to time they hear earthly relatives calling for help and for them to go and pilot in another spirit.

765 With both mali and birrimbirr safely disposed of, the bones are smeared with red-ochre, and involved totemic symbols

are painted on the clean smooth skull. Bones are often 765
carried for years in long bark parcels, and women wail over
them at any hour of the day or night. Once this poignancy
passes, the ceremonies are completed, and an inter-tribal [628]
gathering is regarded as suitable for a bone-burial; several
skeletons may be interred in the one post. These long hollow
burial-posts are cut from the hollow trunks of gum trees,
scraped smooth, and carefully painted with designs and [531]
symbols descriptive of totem centres. Mourning ceremonies
are conducted each night until the bones are packed inside;
skulls and large bones are broken up to conserve space and
each bone is realistically rammed into place. At one burial
ceremony I could not understand why one horde painted
the skull and another horde dressed body bones, and it
was explained that the bones belonged to one horde and
the skull to another. This skull should have been interred
ten years previously, when the skeleton was packed in a
burial post, but the women did not want to part with it
and had kept it till the present ceremony.

With a shout men close in on the burial post and run with it to a small hole in the sand, where it is erected and rammed into place, to stand about twelve feet above ground. In a frenzy of emotion, men dance round it in a final benediction and are encouraged by intensified wailing from the women. An unnatural silence follows the dance, for it concludes abruptly when the leader says simply: 'It is finished.' No further interest is taken in the bones even if the post later topples over and they are scattered on the sand.

Skeletons on the Wessel Islands and Woodah Island are
deposited in caves. Scores of bats hung from the roof and
fluttered into the sunlight when I went into this cave of the
dead on Woodah Island. Skulls lay around in all stages of
disintegration, and on the floor there was a pile of bone dust
almost two feet high. A large horde once lived here, but 361
now, apart from those who occasionally come over from the

361 mainland to hunt for turtle eggs, the island is deserted.

I saw hordes behind Boucaut Bay practising a form of
266 cannibalism and eating their dead. A wealth of tradition
773 lies behind this custom, which originated with the eating of
[764] their tribal Ancestress. This prehistoric giantess came from
the west and finished her labours at Boucaut Bay, where she
made a plain and a swamp full of vegetable food and fish.
Near by she bore children and established the local hordes.
Many years later the Goddess died and left the horde the
problem of disposing of her body. She had been an active
Goddess, and the hordes had depended on her, and now,
as they had no desire to lose the prestige she had given them,
they retained her strength by eating her body.

The precedent of the Goddess is advanced as the reason
for continuing the custom of eating dead relatives and
enemies killed in battle. All hair is scraped off and burnt,
266 intestines are removed and buried, and the head is severed
764 from the trunk. Meanwhile relatives prepare an oven
[262] by digging a trench, lining it with stones, and lighting
a fire on top. When the tempo of singing and dancing has
increased to fever-pitch, the skull is pierced and the brain
removed, wrapped in bark, and given to the mother to
guard. The skull is cooked, separately cleaned, painted,
and hoarded. Removing the bones is a lengthy process and
must be done carefully so as not to sever the limbs. All bones
are exposed in a tree to bleach before being painted and
hoarded till it is convenient to pack them in a burial-post.

When the stones in the trench are hot, the coals are scraped
away, and a relative grasps the hands of the now boneless
and headless body, drapes it over his shoulders and
dances among the chanting, wailing horde. It is lowered
into the trench-oven, covered with bark and sand and
allowed to cook to the accompaniment of singing and
[533] dancing. Most chants relate to the departing spirit, and in

them the strength of the dead man is urged to enter the 266
bodies of those who have consumed his flesh. 764

Nomads cheerfully admitted that they enjoy the feasts, [533]
but pointed out that aged, deformed, sick, or diseased men are never eaten. These have no virtue and would weaken rather than strengthen those participating in the rite.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Creation Myths—Out of the Dawn

*773 As with most primitive people, the story of Creation is of the
utmost importance to the aboriginal. Everything he says
[771] and does, from the songs he sings to the way he catches and
cooks his food, is determined by the way it was done by his
mythical creators. A striking similarity links aboriginal
creation stories with the myths of all primitive peoples, even
to the inclusion of a supernatural serpent. One Arnhem
Land snake went so far as to eat two of the ancestral agents;
today he is the most important living link with the spirit
[821] world. His voice is thunder, and lightning flashes from his
tongue.

Legends in east Arnhem Land say that these mythical
Ancestors came from 'over the sea' and 'beyond the dawn';
hordes in the west believe that their creative agents came
from beyond the sunset.

776 Junkgowa, or creative Ancestresses, came from the spirit-
*773 world of Buralkor. Wangarr is the Great Spirit of Buralkor,
and though vague and indefinite in form and purpose, he
long ago expressed himself through semi-human Junkgowa-
agents, and continues to reveal himself in any unusual
[821] happening, such as an eclipse, an earth tremor, or a cyclone.
Junkgowa created important food-producing areas, unusual
[178] rock formations, peculiar water-holes and springs, which are
links with the spirit-world.

Stories of creation vary greatly, for in east Arnhem Land
[184] the Junkgowa travelled some three hundred miles up and
down amongst a group of three dozen hordes, and now
each horde jealously preserves a detailed account of what

took place in its own particular territory. Yet the essentials 776
of the story agree to an astonishing extent, considering 773*
that there is no written language and that details must 184
be passed on orally or in ochre-painted pictures. By far
the biggest variation concerns the Junkgowa's sex, for in
the east, where they landed, it is said that they were male
and female, but half-way across the social group it is maintained that they were sisters.

Before leaving the spirit-world the Junkgowa created the 773*
sea so that they could travel in their long-nosed canoe, 533
which was paddled in much the same way as their human
descendants learnt to paddle theirs, and they made light of
their toil by improvising songs. First they sang about their
paddles, and this 'paddle song' is preserved as a chorus in an
important ceremony recording Junkgowa songs and tales of
their deeds. Waves rose for the first time, so they sang about
them, and also about turtle, dugong, sharks, deep sea
fish, and a porpoise that guided them on their way. A seagull that followed the canoe, and at times rested on it, is
also immortalized in song.

But singing alone could not do away with their toil and 773*
fatigue, and the Junkgowa became so hot that they called up 821
the cool south-east monsoon, which rose in the spirit-land,
and has blown steadily for at least five months in every
succeeding year. With the breeze behind them they hoisted
a sail, and after several nights and days they made a landfall.
Near the shore the sea was too rough for safe landing, so the
Junkgowa stopped the wind and thereby introduced the
calm that now follows the south-east monsoon and precedes
the north-west monsoon. Presumably they did not allow for 773*
a treacherous 'ninth' wave that over-turned the canoe, and 778
this incident is authenticated by a long black rock that rose
out of the waves to mark the scene of the accident and to
enshrine the lesser-spirit of the canoe. Yulengor point out
the rock to their sons to this day.

YULENGOR

*773 A goanna was among the many sacred totems in the canoe,
778 and he fared better than the rest; he swam ashore and hid
[779] in a lagoon. His lagoon is now an important totem centre,
and the lesser-spirit, or mali, of the goanna guards it. As in
many underground springs, the water occasionally bubbles
up in the lagoon, and this is a sign that the goanna is moving
[562] below. No women are allowed near the totem, and if yams
[784] in the vicinity are eaten the results are fatal. Old men who
remember the Macassars told me that when they attempted
[648] to make their trepang camps on the beach by the lagoon the
Yulengor got rid of them by refusing to allow them to use
the water or to gather firewood.

Restrictions are enforced on firewood in the area, because
the goanna sent his mali into one of the trees growing by the
spring. When the Junkgowa followed the goanna ashore,
they were attracted by the singular beauty of this tree, for as
[825] well as the goanna-mali they saw a small red parrot in the
[531] branches. They declared that thereafter the feathers of this
parrot were to be used in decorating totems of the Dua
moiety. The tree was pronounced sacred; there are now
[824] many of them near the lagoon, and the tabu has been
extended to them all.

*773 Totems, or 'rungga', floated ashore, and the Junkgowa
779 hung them in the tree to dry. But when the pandanus palm
armlets were washed up on the beach, they sprang to life and
grew of their own accord, and the Junkgowa stripped them
[824] of their fronds and wove them into the first aboriginal armlets,
dilly-bags, and nganmaras. These articles are in everyday
use, but because the Junkgowa made them, they are
also totems, and their story is preserved in the songs and
ceremonies of the guardian horde.

Two other sacred centres were visited between Blue Mud
[778] Bay and Cape Arnhem, where the Junkgowa performed
miracles and taught their children totemic secrets and dances.
[796] It is the record of these activities, some of them so trivial as

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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to include natural body functions, that forms the basis of the nomads' ceremonial culture and is preserved in narrative-songs. At Port Bradshaw the Junkgowa made dilly-bags, yam sticks, feather belts, and armlets, and left two lots of children to guard the totems and multiply into the Kalpu and Reratjingo hordes. Today these warlike clans regard the site as their mutual totem centre, though they have nothing else in common. Ten children were born to the Junkgowa at Yallangbarra, but as they were sexless a further miracle was required to change them into normal beings. To do this the Ancestors carved ten effigies; they hid half of them in the long grass on the dunes and laid the remainder in a depression in the sand. Those in the grass grew beards and turned into males, as did five of the sexless children; those in the smooth sand remained smooth faced and exerted a similar influence on the remaining sexless children, who thereupon became females. 773* 779 [796] [778] 773*

Loaded with totems, the Junkgowa turned westward and came to a large granite dome by the shores of Arnhem Bay where they left totems and the nuclei of hordes. This rock is now a totem and preserves the mali of a yam that was first planted beneath its shelter. Between Arnhem and Buckingham Bays a goanna was set free, and the art of making sacred yam sticks and dilly-bags was taught to children born and abandoned there. Fire also was introduced, and its mali was embodied in a totem. 773* 779 [778] [372]

Just how the nomad discovered fire remains a mystery, but today his fire-making is a simple though skilful art. Like the first Ancestors, the operator rests a short softwood stick on the ground, and sitting behind it he holds it firmly in place with his foot. In the upper surface of the softwood he bores a shallow hole and makes a small cut to form a channel in one side of it. A pointed hardwood stick is placed in the hole and twirled rapidly backwards and forwards between his palms so that the friction causes the softwood fibre to 372

372 smoulder. This falls on a handful of dead grass which is held in the wind, or blown on, till it bursts into flame. I have seen the whole operation of fire-making completed in as little as twenty-three seconds, or in scarcely more time than it takes to open a box of matches, select one and strike it.

*773 On their way westward the Junkgowa raised a circular granite dome into which they fused the lesser spirit of the sun. Yulengor beat this sun-totem when the country becomes saturated and impassable in the wet season, and it is said that this causes the water to evaporate. [778] [789]

Away in the west a rising cloud of smoke interested the Junkgowa, and they made their way toward it and came on an old Man sitting by his camp fire. He was startled by the Women; the more so when they spoke to him in his own tongue and asked what he was doing.

His reply was noncommital: 'I sit by myself.'

'Yes, we can see that. Are there no other Men here?'

In a burst of confidence the hermit told them that he was the last of his horde: 'All my brothers are dead. They died from sores leaving white patches on their skin. Whenever they scratched themselves, the skin came off, and then they died.' Daunted neither by his rusticity nor his lugubrious tale, the Women made a wind-break shelter and camped a few yards from his fire. Next night they ventured a little nearer, and on the third night they suggested to him that it would be more sociable if they were all to camp together rather than keep two camp-fires alight. He agreed to the suggestion, and as the dawn was breaking twins were born to each of the Junkgowa. Many children were sent out from this camp to inaugurate new hordes, but first they were trained in arts and crafts, beliefs and magic, and received totems, ceremonial secrets, and Stone Age implements. When the old Man died, the Women experienced again the restless urge to go westward, and they broke camp and followed the sun till they stumbled on another lonely campfire. 773*

Just where all these old Men came from is something of a mystery, for the Junkgowa were fated to find several more of them. Yulengor merely say that 'they lived there and grew up like grass'. They were semi-human, like the Junkgowa, but with the difference that the Women had come from the spirit-world and the Men were of the earth.

Eight pairs of children were born at Yauré-Yaurngor, and like all Junkgowa children they were fully developed at birth and able to care for themselves. Mangrove worms were created here, and the Junkgowa waded out on the mud-flats to show their children how to eat them. [825] [262] Worms, the colour of the surrounding mud, and as long as an arm, are drawn from mangrove roots, and without mastication they are allowed to slip slowly down the throat till the heads can be bitten off and discarded.

In those days Women were the guardians of ceremonial secrets, and their male children led a vague, indolent existence. 773* 779 But when the Ancestresses began preparing for the first of the great inter-tribal ceremonies, their sons became jealous. Consequently, when the Women hung their totems on a tree and went off at low tide to gather shellfish, one of their eight sons said: 'Let us take all these totems and make the Women gather our food.' Unanimous approval greeted the suggestion, so they collected the totems and took them into the scrub. Now, the Junkgowa were aware of the insurrection while they were still on the mud-flats, because every shellfish they picked up opened its mouth and told them the news. On their return to camp, their daughters confirmed their fears but could not help them beyond showing them the men's tracks leading into the bush. Following the tracks, the Junkgowa came to a clearing where the men were singing, but as they hurried forward to recover the totems they were overcome by the

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HEAD CUTTING FOR SORROW OR JOY

Mothers 'rejoicing' for sons they had thought dead

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INITIATION CEREMONY

Painting a boy for his initiation-circumcision

[facing p 134]

*773 power of the men's ceremonial singing and dancing, and
779 after the manner of women they were compelled to block
their ears, to hide their faces and to run from the place.
With unholy glee my informants recounted the rout of the
Junkgowa Women, and added that they consoled themselves
by saying: 'No matter, let the men keep the totems.' And
men have guarded them ever since.

*773 Having outstayed their usefulness at Yaure-Yaurngor,
776 the Ancestresses were relieved to hear the beating of distant
clap-sticks, and traced them to Elcho Island. They came to
the western end of Cadell Strait, and seeing plenty of fish
they tried to catch them, but only succeeded in injuring
their hands. Until this time their hands were webbed and
without fingers, but as they chased the fish and repeatedly
struck their hands on the rocks the skin was broken and
fingers were formed.

*773 Elcho Island is an important totem centre in Arnhem
779 Land, where self-created totems were in existence before
[778] the Junkgowa arrived. One of the peculiarly shaped totem-rocks embodies the mali of the 'shout' in the great Ngara
ceremony. Others contain the mali of yam sticks, crabs,
and palm mats. As these totems were being evolved they
were attacked by swarms of sandflies and forced to retreat
along the beach, till finally they wriggled into the sand for
protection, and now only small parts of them project above
the surface.

The Ancestresses made a long sand-bar totem, that they
might cross to the island and endow it with the mali of their
[778] clap-sticks. On a nearby reef they dropped two large rocks
to enshrine their own lesser-spirits. Another sun-totem was
[789] made on the beach, and like the one near Arnhem Bay it is
[821] beaten after heavy rain. In support of the custom, one of
my guides remarked: 'Yes, Ngulprei's mother beat it last
wet season to make the ground dry so she could go for yams
*773 at the other end of the island.' By the side of the sun-totem

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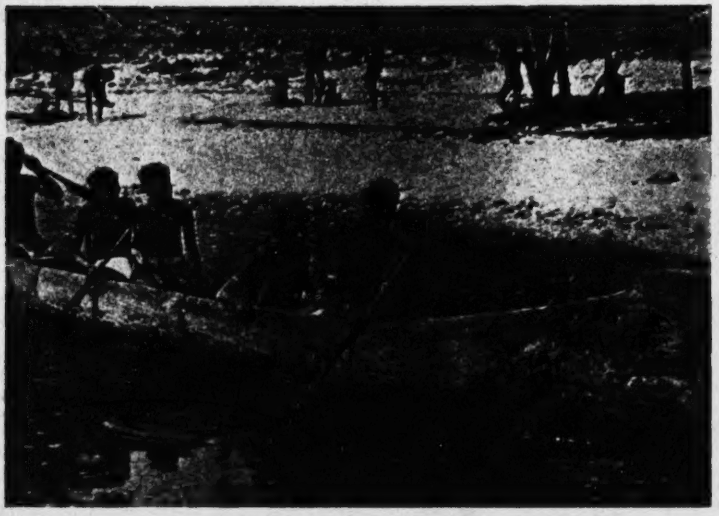

POWERFUL PADDLERS

During cyclonic weather five Yulengor paddled 150 miles, past hostile islands, to get medical aid for the author

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INTERMENT

Skeletons being placed in a burial post

[facing p135]

the Junkgowa met the Men with the clap-sticks and learned 773*
that they had come from Murungga Island, one of the Crocodile Islands. Like old Men previously encountered, these also claimed to be self-created Junkgowa from the Murrnggin clan; they had crossed over to Elcho Island to prevent the female Junkgowa coming to the coast. This temporary restraint was soon overcome, and the Men called the Women 'gutara' or brothers' or sisters' grandchildren, and the Women reciprocated with 'mari' or grandparents' brothers.

On the first night, the Men brought out their clap-sticks, 773*
and like modern nomads they entertained their visitors with 533
horde songs. But their timing was so fast, that the visitors [574]
were shocked, and said they would teach them a new song; thereupon they introduced them to the celebrated Ngara ceremony. After it was all over the Men conceded that they had a lot to learn about singing: 'We may be better at food-gathering, but you Women are our superiors in singing and totemic lore. We would like to sing your way.' Thus the old Murrnggin songs lapsed and the Junkgowa ceremonies were established.

Many songs were sung through the night, and as the Men 773*
began to sing them, a subterranean being, 'Bunar-ka' [776]
(literally a roll of paper-bark), rose out of the sand and
thumped the ground in unison. Bunar-ka is totemically
linked with the rite of circumcision, and the Junkgowa made [881]
the most of the occasion by taking two Murrnggin boys and initiating them beside the sun-stone. Designs were painted on the boys, and they were loaded with belts, armlets, and other brightly coloured decorations still used in circumcision ceremonies. They sang and danced the usual preliminaries, and then chipped a sharp flake from the sun-stone with which to perform the operation. As it neared completion, the youths sank into the sand, and later came up some distance offshore, leaving an outcrop of rock to

* 773 record the event. At high tide this rock is covered by sea water, and to this day it pours out a stream of fresh crystal-clear water.

A geologist might explain this Junkgowa miracle, by observing that the spring-water holds iron in solution, and that as it bubbles up, the surrounding sand is cemented and built into a crater. A similar structure in Arnhem Bay was put to use by Macassar traders, who wedged a hollow tree trunk into the neck of the spring. The fresh spring-water rose inside the tree, ran out along the hollow limb and into the fishermen's buckets brought alongside in their canoes. Though the salt water rose over the spring, the fresh water continued to flow from this improvised fountain.

* 773
779 Once the Elcho Island totems had been established, the Junkgowa parted company. The Men remained to guard the site, but the female Junkgowa had many totems and unborn children to distribute, so they crossed to the mainland. They followed the shores of Castlereagh Bay, placing the totems, establishing new hordes, creating peculiar rock formations, and making food areas. By the sea they made shallow marine plains, and on them planted sea-grass, and in these salt-water pastures they left turtle and dugong. Near the head of the bay the Women produced children in greater numbers, saying: 'We must go slowly up and down, leaving hordes and totems here, or we shall never get rid of them.' This accounts for the large number of
[161] hordes around Castlereagh Bay, which has the densest population in Arnhem Land. On a wide plain they planted clumps of jungle and allocated a separate jungle to each horde for its totem centre, and in each jungle a pair of children were born and told to inaugurate a horde.

By the low-lying shores of Castlereagh Bay the Women
[184] found salt-water plains, where they opened their dilly-bags
[531] to distribute totems, but found that they had already given
[237] away all those decorated with red feathers. Those remaining

were adorned with clay, string, and fur, and in consequence this form of decoration is still used here, whereas to the east of Castlereagh Bay strikingly beautiful decorations are made with red and green parrot feathers. 773* [779] [184] [531]

Two old Men who were sitting by their fish traps, saw the Women, and said: 'What Women are these?' Self-consciously both Men and Junkgowa Women wound string round their waists and snatched green twigs for pubic shields. Later the Men invited the Women to share their camp: 'Come over here,' they said, 'we have plenty of fish.' As they approached the camp, the Women noticed that their Junkgowa dialect had undergone a subtle change, for they were unconsciously adopting the dialect of the fishermen. For many moons the Ancestresses ate fish from the fish traps, which are still a pronounced feature in aboriginal life on the salt plains. They taught the Men new songs and dances and sent out their offspring with totems and stone implements to found hordes. But beckoning smoke again rose in the west, and the Ancestresses left the Men to their fish traps. [237]

From this point the account of their wanderings is vague, for they reached the borders of a new group of hordes which have their own creation myths, beliefs, customs, and language. Nevertheless, my informers emphatically asserted that, although these western 'foreigners' are self-contained and have no intercourse eastward, they were created by the Junkgowa. My guides had previously skirted the 'foreign' west country in canoes and pearling luggers, and when they noticed any features such as the sand dunes at Hall's Point and nearby food swamps they claimed them as the work of the Junkgowa. 773* 829

Still farther to the west, some five hundred miles from their original landing at Port Bradshaw, the Women came to the open sea at Cape Don. They were perplexed by the sight of the sea barring their way, and scratched their heads, and threw the lice into the sea. But the lice 773*

*773 immediately emerged in the form of Melville and Bathurst Islands. The Women then made rafts from sheets of paper-
[501] bark, drove digging sticks through the sheets to keep them in
[484] place, and loaded their few remaining possessions on top. They swam behind these and crossed the eighteen-mile-wide Dundas Strait to Melville Island, and by this method aboriginal women today cross creeks and rivers.

*773 Aboriginals on Melville and Bathurst Islands form a
829 distinct social group and have no intercourse with the adjacent mainland. Nevertheless, Yulengor five hundred miles eastward maintain that their Junkgowa went to these islands and there distributed nomads, totems, and animals. One old man told me (and what he said is accepted generally) that he went to Bathurst Island on a pearling lugger, and in the customary exchange of sacred lore with the islanders they showed him their totemic water-hole, which, they said, was inhabited by two grotesque mythical beings. These creatures had the tails and bodies of snakes, but the heads of men. That was enough for the visitor; although he did not enlighten his hosts, he went back to his own people, and said: 'I know our Junkgowa are there.'

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Two Women and a Serpent

LONG after the creative Ancestresses disappeared into the 773*
west, two other vague heroines came from that direction. It is not known where they came from, except that their birthplace was in the darkness beyond the setting sun. They came to discover the land from which the sun rose and to explore this world of light.

By the time they reached Arnhem Land their journey had developed into a triumphal march from one sacred site to another. They finished the work of the Junkgowa by distributing arts and crafts and animals. They also made a new palm-leaf dilly-bag and manufactured the first stone axe-heads, as well as providing two or three quarries from which they are now chipped. Bush food was scarce before their time, and they distributed edible animals and made the popular 'sugar-bag' or native bees' nests. These minute 262
stingless bees build small nests in hollow trees. Nomads cut [136]
an opening and scoop out a pint of wax and watery syrup [222]
mixed with chips and scores of bees. They eat the lot. Families camp in the hills for a week or more, and live on 'sugar-bag', with land-snails, goannas, and small animals to give some variety to this diet.

The Women came one day to a high circular hill covered 773*
by dense vegetation and inhabited by every known bird, reptile, yam, and fruit. It was an ideal camping-place and they stayed there for a long time eating their first raw meat and naming and distributing the animals and birds to the eight marriage-subsections or 'malk'. It will be recalled [617]
that every child is born into one of these eight malk and can

*773 marry only into another specified malk. Animals and birds
[617] assigned by the Women to the malk were accepted as the
insignia or 'djungoin' of those marriage-groups.

The earthly paradise on the round hill kept the Women
occupied in naming and distributing fauna, and in in-
[796] augurating the famous Gunabibee ceremony in which the
story of their work and adventures is preserved. In decorat-
ing themselves and their totems for the ceremony, they
[237] began the present-day practice of drawing their own blood
and smearing it over their bodies as an adhesive for the
birds'-down so often applied now in strikingly effective
752 designs. Blood is taken by a process suggestive of barbarism
and scientific knowledge of blood circulation. In west
Arnhem Land string is tied above the elbow of the donor,
who closes his hand and alternately bends and straightens
his arm till the veins show up. One of these is nicked with a
shell or spear-head, and by bending and relaxing the arm
the blood is pumped into a bark container. To seal the
wound the tourniquet is removed, and a boll from the cotton
tree is dabbed over the opening. Half a pint of blood may be
[413] removed, and the donor and his friends unconcernedly
paint it over their bodies with fibre or human-hair brushes.
Before it congeals they apply birds' feathers.

*773 In time the younger of the two Sisters realized that, for reasons unspecified, she was about to give birth to a child. Consequently they searched for a good camp site and found one near a lagoon. After the fashion of women, they had fossicked during the day for food, and had also gathered sheets of paper-bark to cover their hut, so that by the time they came to the lagoon they were loaded down with rolls of bark, and their dilly-bags bulged with yams, goannas, and animals.

The older Woman built the hut and bent sticks into a
dome, resembling the ribs of an umbrella, and covered these
[415] with bark. Meanwhile, her sister went to the lagoon for

773*
[415]

water, and taking a piece of bark she twisted a vine around the gathered ends of it to make the common water-basket or 'durrnier'. By the lagoon she bent down to dip water and her mali or ghost then quietly slipped into the pool, but she was unconscious of what had happened and returned to the camp. So far the camp was an unusually good one, and there being little to do, the young Sister rested in the sand and watched the older Woman scrape open the fire and drop a handful of landsnails on the coals to cook. As soon as they touched the fire, however, the snails turned over and ran into the lagoon.

Incredulously the Women stared at each other: 'Did you see that? What happened to the snails to make them run like dogs?'

'They must be a new kind of snail. Perhaps this is their totem country. Try the snake and goanna, they look dead enough.' But the Sisters had to jump to safety, for when the reptiles fell into the ashes, they shuddered, scattered the fire, and wriggled into the water.

In stunned silence the Woman rebuilt the fire. 'You had better cook the yams,' the young Sister advised, 'they have no legs and cannot get away.'

Yet when the yams were dropped into the fire, they also wriggled out by the hairs that grew on their skin, kicked their way down the slope into the lagoon, and swam away.

All the animals, yams, and reptiles escaped in this way, until only a bush-rat and small wallaby remained in a dilly-bag; these had been reserved for special cooking in a stone oven. But the Sisters were so hungry that the young one suggested that they cook them on the coals rather than wait for the oven to heat. No sooner had they touched the dilly-bag, however, than the dead animals came to life, kicked and tore it to shreds and bounded into the lagoon.

'Now there is nothing left to eat. What is the matter with all the food?'

*773 'There must be something in that water.'

'Yes. This might be a Wangarr (Great Spirit) place. I think a big Wangarr snake lives in there and ate all our food.'

The sun had set, it was too late to look for a new camp, and, in any case, the younger Woman was too weak to travel. Tired and hungry, they sat at the door of their hut, watching a strange white cloud in the west. It was about the size of a man's hand, but as it climbed overhead it increased in size till it was as big as a turtle. It then turned black, spread over the sky and came down near the lagoon, whereupon torrents of rain fell into the water and on the Women's camp; strangely enough, the ground a few chains away remained dry.

The stage was now set.

Thunder roared and lightning crackled and hissed along the ground, till the young Woman roused out of her coma and asked: 'Sister, what is the matter?' And, as her child was born at that moment, she prophesied: 'This is no ordinary storm. Wangarr is sending it out of the lagoon to drown us.'

'Yes, that is true. We had better leave the child and dance outside to stop the rain.'

In the darkness they circled round the hut, dancing and singing, in a desperate attempt to divert the attention of Wangarr, but the rain fell with even greater violence. They had but one other scheme, the singing of the third great
796 native ceremony known as the Junggowan. And to the
Sisters dancing in the rain goes the honour of first per-
535 forming the songs, dances, and myths in the present-day
628 Junggowan which, like the Ngara and Gunabibee, is an
796 inter-tribal link; the myths it enshrines are sung and danced
when hordes meet for intercourse. Their efforts had no effect on the rain, but the totemic powers released through their sacred pantomime disturbed the serpent Kaitjalan.

TWO WOMEN AND A SERPENT

Kaitjalan had been asleep under the lagoon and came out to see who was dancing. His cavern was blocked by a huge granite boulder, several chains in circumference, but he removed this and threw it on the edge of the lagoon, where it stands today, the only rock in the vicinity. He rested his head on this great stone and watched the Women. Faster and faster they circled round their shelter, and Kaitjalan hissed in unison. By his rhythmical hissing, the serpent hoped to lull the sisters to sleep, and at last he had the satisfaction of seeing their steps become slower. Most of the cloud had cleared away by this time, and in the drizzling rain the death-adders and snakes came from the surrounding bush and crawled round the hut after the fast-tiring Women. Stronger and stronger grew the hissing rhythm, and slower and slower moved the weary Women, till at last they slept. Even then Kaitjalan hissed on till they snored. Slowly the great serpent drew his body from the lagoon and encircled the camp and rested his head in the doorway to watch the sleeping forms. Even more cautiously he advanced and licked the child, the mother, and finally her sister, before completing his hypnotism by swallowing them whole.

Kaitjalan would have rested after his totemic meal, had not a nausea seized him. In spite of himself, he was forced upright on his tail, and he moaned aloud 'Ooh-ooh-ooh', or, as a modernized Yulengor suggested: 'Like the big boats that come into Darwin harbour.' No one answered him in his distress, so he called in turn for the three other east Arnhem Land totemic snakes in Arnhem Bay, Blue Mud Bay, and the Wessel Islands: 'Where are you? Why don't you answer me? Are you asleep or can't you talk? Are you away at —— ?' and he named a dozen or more important totem centres.

The Wessel Island serpent was the first to reply, with an irritable but canny inquiry: 'What is the matter with you? What have you been eating?'

*993 'I have been tasting all the totemic animals and birds.'

'They are good food. What else have you been eating? Did you eat any crocodiles, turtle, or big fish?'

With vehement readiness, the conscience-smitten Kaitjalan avowed: 'No, I did not.'

An interjection then came from the Arnhem Bay serpent: 'Did you eat any dugong?' But, without waiting for an answer, Wessel Island, who was now thoroughly aroused, stood on his tail and boomed: 'What have you eaten?' Hard-pressed for time, Kaitjalan parried with the query: 'What have you been eating yourself? You are making a big noise and standing on your tail.'

Now Wessel also was a mighty gourmand, and had just eaten a great totemic rock cod, but unlike Kaitjalan, he had nothing to hide, so he temporized with ungodlike coquetry: 'You tell me what you ate, and then I will tell you.' Not to be tricked so easily into confessing the enormity of his escapade, Kaitjalan descended to a maudlin dodge: 'You tell me what you ate and then I will tell you.' 'Well,' said Wessel, 'I ate a big totem fish.' And with that he collapsed and fell down toward Kaitjalan, so that his tail remained in the Wessel Islands, and his head rested by Kaitjalan's lagoon, eighty miles away.

'Now tell me what you ate.'

'A baby. I ate a small baby.'

'Yes, that is better. But you must have eaten more than that. Tell me all you ate.'

'Women. I ate ——' And bursting into the great Gunabibee Saga, [996] Kaitjalan related the entire story of the Women, their work, the scene by the camp fire, the birth, the storm, and the events leading up to the consummation of a serpent's meal.

Wessel was dumbfounded: 'Why did you eat the three of them? Why didn't you leave some for me?'

Kaitjalan regretted having consumed all of them on his own, but offered an excuse: 'I thought you had your own 773* food, judging by the noise you made.' Kaitjalan was sorely troubled and groaned loudly. Finally he fell down beside Wessel, and in so doing he made a deep rent in the ground, sheared the side off a giant paper-bark tree, and lay still.

Hours later, when the Morning Star rose in the east, Wessel shuffled back to his island cave, but Kaitjalan could not move, for nausea held him. With the breaking of day the Women turned inside him and tormented him, so that he groaned: 'Why did I eat these Women?' and he vowed a vow to eat only animals in the days to come. Eventually he was seized by a convulsion; he spewed them beside the camp and crawled slowly into the lagoon and rested his head on the stone.

Green tree-ants invaded the hut at sunrise and bit the child till it cried, and this disturbed the Women; but they were so soundly asleep, that they only moved fitfully and returned to their slumber. Kaitjalan saw all this, and his anger was rekindled against the Sisters for the discomfort they had caused him. Their twitching and squirming from the ants so irritated him, that he took his clap-sticks and killed them, and once again swallowed them. But this time he took the precaution of removing their mali, which he fused into three granite rocks near the pool. Kaitjalan now returned to his cavern and went far down into the earth, where he remains to this day.

Kaitjalan's lagoon is well hidden in the bush and supplies 778
a small river that empties into Castlereagh Bay. Men go 773*
there for inter-tribal dances or to see for themselves the marks of the struggle in which their beliefs were born. The granite dome by the water is pointed out as the door of Kaitjalan's cavern, and the three boulders beside it are said to harbour the spirits of the Women and child. Concentric channels show where bush snakes wriggled round the hut after the Women during the fatal storm, and a deeply eroded channel

YULENGOR

* 773 [778] is the rent made by Kaitjalan when he collapsed and fell to earth, shearing away the limbs of a great paper-bark tree, which is still scarred and torn, as though struck by lightning.

On calm moonlit nights the faint echoes of the Gunabibee ceremony can be heard from under the waters of the lagoon, and men know then that Kaitjalan and the Women are recalling the past and communing with Wangarr, in the Spirit-land of Buralkor.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Sun and Morning Star

BEFORE the Junkgowa left the spirit world they made the sun to guide them through the primordial darkness and gave her countless legs, or rays, by which she was to make her daily journey across the sky. The Junkgowa left before dawn in their canoe, and after travelling for some hours, looked back to see if the sun had risen to follow them, but they saw no more than her glow behind the skyline. They called her several times, but she made no response, till they took their clap-sticks and 'sang' their magic on her. This forced her out of the sea and she slowly followed them. The Junkgowa again instructed the sun to walk above the earth and show Yulengor where to look for food: 'You are the great light and this is your work.' They noticed then that she carried a double-pointed digging-stick and had a dilly-bag hanging from her head, and upon inquiring the meaning of the hunting equipment, they learned that a son had been born to her after they had left the spirit world. She also said that the child had made her reluctant to commence the journey. 773*
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Unlike the sun, her child had no limbs or rays, for the Junkgowa were not present at his birth to complete his creation. So he remains in Buralkor and 'sits like a stone waiting for his mother'. She returns every night to breast-feed him, otherwise she would for ever wander in the sky, lighting and warming the earth. This motherly anxiety to get back to her child accounts for the sun's tropical haste in dropping into the west and leaving behind sudden darkness. Coleridge's apt remark, 'With one stride comes the

*773 dark', is illustrated every day in Arnhem Land, for there is 821 no twilight; twenty to thirty minutes after sunset it is too dark to read ordinary newsprint, and within ninety minutes it is as dark as at any time during the night.

Once out of sight in the west the sun abruptly changes her course and travels northwards before going east along a well-worn track below the rim of the horizon. This is her short-cut to the spirit world and her waiting child. When the Junkgowa gave the Yulengor all this information, they also said that if ever men looked on the sun-child they would die, and now it is accepted that the sun was made for the earth, but that her child belongs to the dimly lit spirit world.

The night is long and tiresome to nomads; they chafe at the sun's tardiness in rising every morning, and they try to console themselves with the knowledge that she is preparing her own totemic food. They say: 'The baby cries often, and 512 asks her not to leave him.' Except in big camps, and during ceremonies, the nomadic family reclines round the fire soon after sunset and usually everyone is asleep by 9 p.m. It is well known that when sleeping in the open one tends to [513] waken early, and allowing the nomad six hours' sleep at night in addition to that obtained during the heat of the day, he will wake before daylight. Some of them are invariably sitting up and talking long before sunrise, and in the early dawn it is a common sight to see families grouped disconsolately round the embers of their night fires, watching and waiting for the sun.

*773 Bunumbirr, the Morning Star, stays with the sun-child to 821 keep him company in the daytime. By sunset the star is awake and makes ready to leave, but as the sun comes home about this time he waits for a time and talks to her as she prepares her food. Bunumbirr's work is to commence the new day, and shortly after midnight he leaves the sun-family and travels slowly earthwards, throwing off the covers of darkness and heralding the sun's coming to waiting

Yulengor. He is a welcome messenger of light. A rope is 773* attached to Bunumbirr's waist, and he unwinds it as he 821 comes out of Buralkor so that when the sun-child has been fed and his mother is about to leave he can conveniently haul on the rope and draw the star back to keep him company. Bunumbirr always meets the sun on her way out, and he disappears from the sky as she is about to break over the horizon.

In Creation days the Junkgowa made a man and two women and sent them out to commence a horde-family in the sky. They are still grouped there by the side of Canthus.

During the wet season the stars converge, and it is said then that the husband has made a big shelter for himself and his wives. Such an arrangement is due primarily to the machinations of the elder sister, who regularly gives birth to a child at the end of the year and coerces the young wife to care for her and hunt for the family's food, but when the rains are finished she sends her off again to camp by herself: 'You make your camp over there, because I want this shelter for my husband and child.'

This horde-family of the heavens lives as naturally as do Yulengor. By day the women forage for swamp rush-corms, water-lilies, and cycad nuts, and at night sing and dance by the fire. Occasionally when the starlight seems to change into a red glow it is said that the husband is playing on his drone pipe and that the women are dancing. On still nights the women can be heard calling their cats: 'Jai . . . r, Jai . . . r, Ch, Ch, Ch!' on much the same cooeeing notes that Yulengo [731] women now use when calling their dogs. Unfortunately the family in the sky has no dogs, though no reason is given for this absence of the otherwise ubiquitous dingo.

'Jurrpan' is the Evening Star, and a long time ago he was an ordinary nomad living with his family on the eastern

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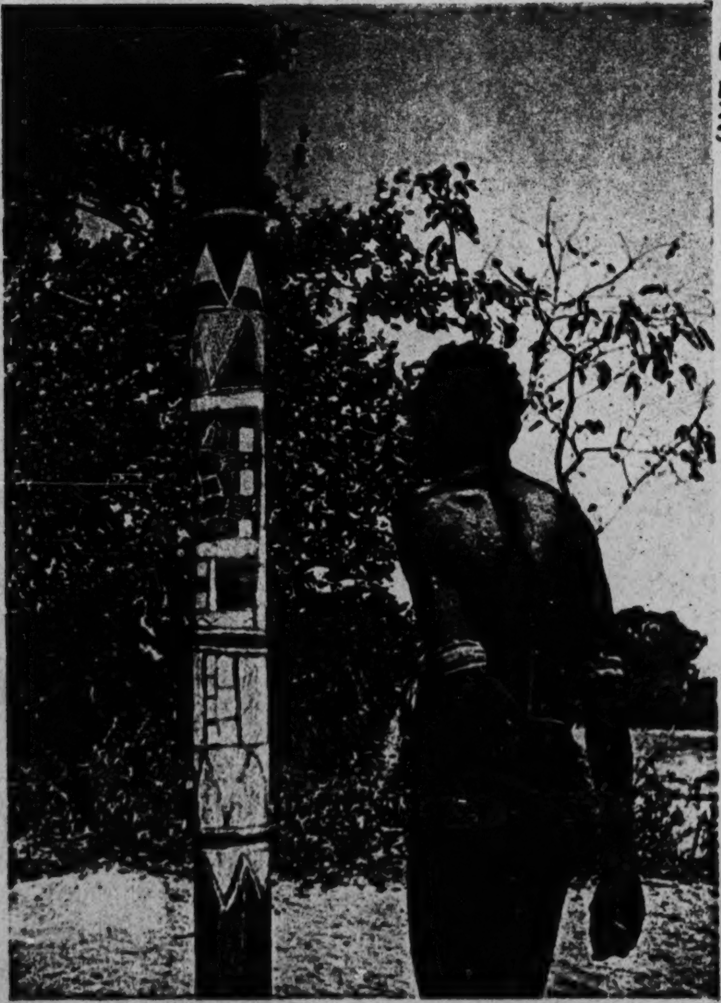

BURIAL POST IN A DESERTED CAMP

[facing. p150]

*793 shores of Arnhem Bay, the father of a strong horde, fearing
821 no one. He was a mighty hunter and sometimes hunted far into the west. His family revered him and so vied for his favours that he was able to retire from the strenuous life of hunting. Jurrpan thought on many things as he sat in idleness by his fire. He knew that he had been wise in building up his horde till it was stronger than any other, he had the respect of all who knew him, yet he was far from satisfied. One night, restlesaly waiting for the dawn, he saw the Morning Star rise over the hills to prepare the new day, and suddenly he knew what he wanted. He determined to leave the earth, climb into the western sky and there make his body glow like the Morning Star.

At that time the horde was camped by a lagoon, so Jurrpan disappeared when his sons and their wives were food-gathering. On their return at sundown they called and searched for the old man, but when they could not find his tracks leading away from the camp, they suspected that he had been spirited off by evil magic. One conjecture followed another, till they saw a brilliant star shining in the west, and from it heard the voice of Jurrpan calling them: 'I am camping up here now. I'm finished with the earth and shall stay here and make my body glow like Bunumbirr' (the Morning Star).

'But what will we do? Can't we come up there with you?'

On this point Jurrpan was adamant: 'No,' he said, 'I want you to change yourselves into a new food and live in the swamp near my old camp.'

Jurrpan's word had always been law, and now in spite of the confusion that spread through the camp no one thought of rebelling. They did as they were told and changed them-
[824] selves into the well-known 'rarkai', or swamp rush-corm.
[262] Rarkai is a favourite food and spreads over great areas of swamp in the wet season, ripening after the water evaporates.

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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YULENGOR HUT

Such a hut was used by the two women in Creation days

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THE POOL OF AMBIJ

[facing p151]

SUN AND MORNING STAR

Late in the year women gather the corms, and at sunset they 773*
can see Jurrpan in the western sky shining down on his 821
ripening swamp-children. [262]

The Milky Way Galaxy is a wide river and was made by the creative Ancestresses before they came to the earth. Strong winds blow over it and whip up white-crested waves, thereby accounting for its peculiar diffused light. Two brothers once came to this Barduru River and planned to cross it. Wawa, the elder brother, said: 'We will need a strong canoe to carry us. Let us go back into the bush till we find a tree with a good sheet of bark.' Yuku Yuku, the younger brother, offered to cut the paddles; he felled a softwood tree and made them like those now used by nomads, except that they were extremely thin and pliable. Nevertheless they were effective and the canoe travelled rapidly.

By the time the brothers were half-way across the river
the sun set and a wind swept down from the hills and lashed
the waves till they filled the canoe. Jumping overboard,
after the manner of modern Yulendor, the men tried to [502]
empty their canoe by rocking it from side to side, but wind
and waves in the darkness compelled them to abandon it,
and they struck out for the shore.

Yuku Yuku was wearing several tightly woven string armbands, and it is easy to imagine the inconvenience they caused him once they became wet and began to shrink. After a time he fell behind his brother, and as his arms stiffened, he gasped: 'I cannot keep afloat any longer.'

'Throw your armbands away.'

'I have tried, but they are too tight.'

And he sank.

Wawa did not hear the last remark, but when he looked back and failed to see his brother he returned to search for him. He swam about and called for a long time, yet not till he felt his own strength ebbing did he abandon the

* 773 821 search and make for the shore. Within a few yards of it he also collapsed and sank.

Two days after the heavenly brothers sank in the Milky Way, another member of their horde found their tracks on the river bank and saw the place where they had made a canoe. On the beach he found a paddle and, when the remains of a canoe floated toward him, he had no difficulty in reconstructing the tragedy. A day later his worst fears were confirmed when Wawa's body was washed ashore. The hunter returned to his horde with the doleful news, and that night everyone sang, wailed and performed the purification ceremony to drive off the ghosts of the dead men. But when they went to sleep, Wawa's and Yuku Yuku's ghosts stole into the camp and spoke to the sleeping horde, so that they imagined they were dreaming: 'We have had a lot of trouble. Our canoe sank and we were drowned.' Wawa then took up the tale and told the horde that whenever they looked into the night sky they would see the great Barduru River: 'You will see our dark heads in the river. Yuku Yuku is near a bright star in the middle of it, and my spirit dwells near the shore where I sank.'

165 502 Such tragedies are not infrequent in aboriginal life. Canoes without exception leak badly but nomads risk their lives in any sort of dug-out so long as paper-bark can be rammed into the cracks with a thumbnail. During the time I was in the north at least one canoe fatality occurred every two years, and canoes frequently foundered in the waves. The most recent of these events occurred when seven or eight men and boys left for an island a few miles off-shore; a wind rose at nightfall and no trace has since been found of the men or their canoe.

Two brothers from Yirrkala were turtle-hunting in an old, cracked and waterlogged canoe, which sank under them. They were then three miles off-shore and tried to swim to a barren sandy island two miles away, but one man was a

cripple and soon weakened. He told his brother that he 165
could not go any farther, and calmly preparing to go down 502
he gave away his one and only valuable possession: 'When [763]
you get ashore, you can have my tomahawk,' he said. With
the usual aboriginal courage, loyalty, and determination, [577]
the older man returned to his brother, and by keeping him afloat, and making use of tide and waves, they were washed ashore in an exhausted state on the sandy island, where they remained three days without water or shade. At the end of that time they made a smoke-fire from a wood-drill and drift-wood, and they were rescued by friends from the mainland, who came to see why the brothers were camping on the island.

We were walking along one of the open-sea beaches when 773*
an old man told me the tale of the nautilus shell. He said 821
in effect: 'We call it a moon-shell.' I asked what it had to do with the moon, and was told that the old moon dies once a month and throws this, his skeleton, into the sea. The moon dies, and after the lapse of a few days his spirit is reincarnated and appears as a new moon. I began to understand then why a nomad on seeing a new moon joyfully shouts the news to the camp. Men, women, and children rejoice together as over the return of a long-absent friend.

A long time ago a man camped beside a lagoon in the mountains. Life had dealt kindly with him, but in spite of his pleasant surroundings and good food supply he wanted to live in the sky. At night the Evening Star tantalizingly twinkled in the rippling lagoon, till the man could stand it no longer, so he climbed into the sky. His plan had been carefully thought out: 'I will live with the stars and outshine them till I am an old man, and when I die I will put my spirit in a new body.'

'Ngalindi' goes through this cycle every lunar month, and

*773 821 his body grows from infancy to prime of life, at full moon, and declines to old age and death, all in the space of four weeks. He drops his old skeleton into the sea and we know it as the nautilus shell. The lunar cycle is recommenced by Ngalindi's production of a new infant body for himself—the new moon.

[538] Anthropomorphic conceptions of mythical ancestors, the sun, the moon, and the stars, are so highly developed in aboriginal folk-lore, that apart from a few supernatural powers the characters might be ordinary Yulengor. I asked if all the stars were men and women, and if the sky were populated in the same way as the earth, and I was told that no one knows; it is thought that, though the heavenly bodies once had physical form, they have now become spiritual beings clothed in light, and there are many of them that have not yet been seen.

*773 825 'Guwak' is the general name given to the black pied magpie, ordinarily known as 'mudlark' or 'pee-wee'. They are said to roost among the stars. Nomads believe that they feed on the earth and fly into the sky after sunset. Originally the Guwak were three men made by the Junkgowa and sent out to prepare ceremonial grounds for unborn hordes in Blue Mud Bay and Arnhem Bay. Immediately they had completed their preparations they returned to the Junkgowa with a strange request: 'We have finished our work and now we wish to roam over the earth and fly into the sky.'

'Well,' said the Junkgowa, 'you can come with us as we go into the west.'

'No, we want to be free to fly about and please ourselves. We don't want to walk any more. Our work is finished and we want to fly and see other places.'

The Junkgowa suggested a change of work: 'If you want to see other places, you can go west and make new horde-territories for us.'

'No. We made three horde-territories. We don't want to walk; we want to fly, we want wings.' 773* 825

Yet another problem was raised by the Junkgowa: 'If you have wings and live like birds, what will you eat?'

But the Guwak were prepared for this: 'We will live on cashew fruit, seeing that no one else eats it.'

Finally the Junkgowa gave way and changed them into birds, and made it possible for them to eat the wild cashew fruit. Because the birds are reputed to have eaten this fruit prior to their present-day diet of insects and snails, Yulengor [262] will not eat the birds. On calm nights the isolated cries of the Guwak can occasionally be heard, and it is said that they are singing as they fly amongst the stars.

Some time after the Junkgowa began the work of creation, they were followed from the spirit world by two canoes loaded with birds and animals. Mythical beings, now known as 'Julpan', were in charge of the canoes, and they tried to follow the course taken by the Junkgowa to Port Bradshaw. But 'because they could not see the tracks left by the Junkgowa canoes in the water' they missed the course and sighted land thirty miles north of their objective. A high sea was running at the time, and they had little choice in selecting a good landing, so they tried to go ashore on the western side of Cape Arnhem, but both canoes were swamped in the surf. All the fish, dugong, turtle, and sea-snakes remained in the water; the animals and reptiles swam ashore, wandered wherever it pleased them, and set about propagating their species. Of the birds that flew ashore, some went into the hills and jungles, and others stayed on the coast, each according to its fancy, and there they are found today.

Having fulfilled their mission, the Julpan wondered what next they should do. One suggested leaving the earth: 'Let us go into the sky and camp among the stars,' he said. 773* 821

*773 As the idea was generally popular, they went into the sky,
821 and there they can be seen today as the Pleaides. Next
morning the leader outlined a plan for the future: 'Let us
*773 cut two new canoes. The men will go in one and the women
462 will hunt for our food from the other.' And from that time
forth, women have hunted by themselves and gathered
vegetable foods, shellfish, and small animals, and the men,
less frequently and according to their inclinations, have gone
on their spectacular quests for kangaroo, emu, dugong,
turtle, and fish. Furthermore, the Julpan decreed that this
same division of labour should apply on earth, and for that
reason women have always been the principal food-gatherers
in aboriginal society.

Australian Aborigines OI 5
west Arnhem Land

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Out of the Depths

A MYTH FROM WEST ARNHEM LAND

A GODDESS rose out of the waves and tide-rip at Cape Don, 114
and thereafter the headland became the Mecca of west [773]
Arnhem Land hordes. I first saw the Cape in the early
morning, eighteen hours out from Darwin, after a night on a
choppy sea, with the lugger rolling, plunging, and shipping
water through yawning seams. Decks became slippery
death-traps from a vile mixture of engine oil and sea-water
obstinately baled from the bilge by the aboriginal crew. At
midnight we picked up a beckoning blur from the Don
lighthouse and yawed toward it till dawn, when we found
shelter near by.

Cape Don is a desolate headland. Mangrove jungles 773
fringe the mud-flats and are inhabited by crocodiles, crabs, 778
and tree-climbing fish; stunted gum trees languish on im- [133]
poverished hillsides. But to west Arnhem Land nomads
this is the abode of their spiritual Ancestress; she is the mother of creation and this is the birthplace of their race and their spiritual home. Nomads showed me black rocks or 'nigger-heads' in the vicious tide-rip. Surrounded by whirlpools and half-covered by the seething and swirling tide, they have stood from time immemorial to mark where the Goddess came ashore.

For over two hundred miles eastward, some thirty hordes 773
are linked by her social and totemic laws, rites, and beliefs; 771
but they have nothing in common with those 'Murrnggin' 776
hordes of 'foreigners' in east Arnhem Land who hold so firmly to their belief in ancestral Junkgowa who came from the east and beyond the dawn.

773 the east and beyond the dawn. Numma Moiyuk, the
776 Goddess of the tide-rip, had her own totems and established
[778] her own sacred sites in waterholes, rocks, and jungles, and
as she wandered eastward she bore the first children, who multiplied and populated the country. Numma Moiyuk was eternal and self-created, but she took the form and habits of a woman. When hunting for food she carried her dilly-bag looped round her head, and with the ordinary hardwood digging-stick she grubbed for yams or killed small animals, snakes, and lizards. In appearance she was a giantess: 'As big as the two round mountains near Cape Don', I was told, and being the mother of the race her breasts were so full that they were her most prominent feature. In addition to her heavy burden of unborn children, she carried the first aboriginal weapons, implements, totems, decorations, musical drone-pipe, and clap-sticks.

She was thirsty when she came out of the sea, and for her first miracle she created a pool of water. Being a Goddess, she did the unexpected and made the well so close to the salt water that the waves still lap over the edge. This wonder served to house the mythological Serpent which had followed her out of the sea and now hid in this fresh water cavern.

773 Two children were born near the well and were told to
582 populate the Cape country, to guard tribal secrets entrusted
to them, and to practise the ritual relating to the waterhole.
[617] One child was called 'Sun-skin' and the other 'Water-skin'.
These terms, together with 'Fire-skin 'and 'Pandanus Palm-skin', are the names of the four marriage-subdivisions in
[616] west Arnhem Land. West Arnhem Land society is also
divided into two great moieties, and these again into the
'skin' groups, so that in marriage, a man negotiates for a
[617] woman from the opposite moiety, and then his choice is
further narrowed to a specific skin-group within that
[171] moiety. The system is in general agreement with marriage

regulations throughout aboriginal Australia, but differs 773
slightly from that found in east Arnhem Land, as related in [582]
Chapter 9. [771]

Numma Moiyuk was appalled by the barrenness and poverty of Cape Don, for it was, and still is, poor food country; but her discontent went deeper than hunger, for the restlessness that had brought her out of the tide-rip now urged her to move on eastward: 'To the place where the sun comes up.' On her first day on land she wandered down the shores of Van Diemen's Gulf till she came to a wide plain behind the mud-flats and camped for the night. Yams and animals were plentiful on the lowlands, so at sunrise the Goddess took a dilly-bag and digging-stick and went to look for food. That night two children were born and were told to remain on the plain and populate it whilst Numma Moiyuk went eastward; but they refused to obey. Next day Numma Moiyuk went out again for food, and when she returned, the rebels were still sullenly seated by the camp fire, moodily staring into the pool of whitening embers. Her anger flared, and in a flash she changed the ashes into a wide lagoon and the refractory pair into sentinel hills beside it. By the side of the waterhole she planted a bloodwood gum tree, and in the living timber imprisoned the spirits of her rebellious offspring.

From all west Arnhem Land, nomads come to the waterhole between the hills for their important ceremonies. The [796]
water is wide, clear, and deep, and in the centre is a small [778]
island of reeds which is said to have been specially planted by the Goddess. When more amenable children were born she taught them the art of weaving butterfly-winged fishing-nets from the reeds, and today this craft is in common use in the west. The butterfly fishing-net is made in two sections [227]
or wings. A thin reed is bent in a pear-shaped curve and bound at the apex so that a network of bush string can be laced across it; a twin net is similarly constructed, and one

773 [227] [226] apex is then bound to the other so that the wings may open and close freely. Wading through shallow water with their nets half-open, nomads snare fish by snapping the wings over them.

All that had been accomplished so pleased Numma Moiyuk that she called Ambij, the Serpent, from the pool at Cape Don to come and see. Ambij left his cavern and came to the twin hills, and his fancy was so captivated that he said: 'I will live in this water. This will be my new home and the people will come and hold their great dances under this tree by my waterhole.' [796]

773 776 Ambij the Serpent had been the chief agent in creating the world. From under the tide-rip at Cape Don he had made the earth, the sea, the sky, the sun, and the vegetable foods, but having done this, Numma Moiyuk stayed his hand and reserved for herself the creation of man. He came out of the waves with his Goddess, but as there was nothing more for him to create, he went into the waterhole to watch over the earth. Every night he comes out from his pool in the hills and glides down to the sea for a meal of dugong or fish, and though he has never been seen by mortal eye, his voice of thunder can be heard above monsoonal storms. [821]

In time a strange anomaly developed between the Goddess and the Serpent, in which Ambij undoubtedly 'stole the play'; for when Numma Moiyuk bore the last of her children and finished her work away in east Arnhem Land, she rested there with her children till she eventually died of old age. Her spirit, however, returned to the spirit-world at Cape Don, from whence she is still mildly active in watching over mankind. But Ambij, although he was created and brought out of the sea by Numma Moiyuk, plays a much more spectacular part than the Goddess in aboriginal life. He retains his physical form and is terrifyingly energetic in everyday life, so that laws and tabus are rigidly observed for [821] fear of him. He deserts his waterhole to reveal himself in the

sky as a rainbow, and his name is in constant use. If he rolls 773
on his bed in sudden anger, the accompanying groans and 776
creaks are known as thunder. At other times he leaps from 821
his couch, in a cacophony of thunder, to grasp two great stones and strike them together till they flash fiery lightning, so that the children of men will see and fear him.

It is significant that every year awe-inspiring, dry tropical thunder storms crash and roar in from the sea over his waterhole in the north-western extremity of Arnhem Land. They precede the breaking of the torrential north-west monsoon, and continuous streams of molten lightning crack the black rainless clouds; leaves on the gum trees hang motionless and droop in the humid lull, birds are silent, an oily film smothers the sea, and subdued nomads sit quietly round their camps, intermittently murmuring of Ambij.

A few guardian nomads camp permanently by the pool 778
of Ambij, and old men aver that they stay by the water to guard it and must not leave it on any account except for
the few hours they spend fishing or in hunting. As Ambij [779]
has prophesied, the hordes of the west look on this as their [796]
greatest totem centre and foregather under the tree by the pool for inter-tribal ceremonies.

From Ambij's pool Numma Moiyuk sent two children 773
eastward to journey to the rising sun, where they were to raise up a horde. They were trained in Stone Age arts and crafts and eventually set off loaded with totems and implements, but by the time the Morning Star rose, the man was tired from carrying his genitalia across his shoulders, so he said to his wife: 'We will rest here.' And so they slept. At sunrise the woman awoke hot and thirsty and searched for water on the barren plain, but finding none, she asked her husband to make some. Like his modern ectype he growled at the disturbance and went to sleep again. But as thirst overcame discretion, the woman began to grumble, till at last he rose and smote her with his club and returned to

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773 slumber. Later in the morning the sleeper awoke with a burning thirst, and as he looked round for water and saw his dead wife a great sorrow possessed him. By way of recompense, he petrified her body into a stone pillar, scooped out a well near its base, filled it with water and thereby immortalized her. He also made a cave in the side of the [361] sandstone pile, and to this day nomadic families shelter in it and drink from the spring. For many years the man lived there himself, and when he died, Ambij changed him into the great rock that is now known far and wide as Tor Rock. It is one of the best known landmarks in the west [133] and is visible from fifty miles.

Numma Moiyuk eventually left the pool of Ambij and took a short cut through the bush to Malay Bay, and from thence to Sandy Creek. Children were born, and after being trained in their ritual, arts, and crafts, they were sent out to multiply. A well-favoured food-swamp behind the rim of the beach is credited to the Goddess, and she also planted a large poisonous yam, and introduced water-lilies.

From Barclay Point the Goddess saw Goulburn Island and sent a frilled lizard in a canoe to spy out the land. On his way back the canoe overturned and sank a few chains off shore, and to mark the event, a long black rock was brought out of the waves and stands there to this day. The lizard swam ashore and advised Numma Moiyuk against crossing to the Islands, so she compromised by sending a number of children, complete with dialect, totems, and implements to establish the Maung horde.

773 137 The Goddess planted a giant banyan tree behind the beach at Turner Point. Like all banyans in dry jungles along the coast it belongs to the fig family. Occasionally they attain a great height, though the characteristic feature is the curved root system from the wide spreading limbs. Other sturdy jungle giants are strangled if tenuous, crushing,

banyan aerial-roots light on them and creep earthwards 773
round the living host. Vigorous jungle trees are slowly 137
throttled, till they decay and feed the gluttonous banyan. Long and tall beautifully arched colonnades of silvery grey banyan roots, flung out from the parent stem, support a dense canopy of dark green foliage and stand in a thick soft carpet of fallen brown leaves. Nomads gather the purplish mottled figs, which have only a slight fig-like [262]
flavour. Traders running short of stores have sometimes [222]
used them for food, but at best they resemble sweetened sawdust.

Numma Moiyuk's lesser spirit lives in the banyan at 778
Turner Point, and it is one of the best known coastal totemic 773
sites. No one dares to camp under the tree, in case it should be damaged by fire or broken; such carelessness would [824]
result in an immediate eclipse of the sun. Only elderly initiated men are allowed actually to see the tree, and when [888]
I asked one young man of about twenty-five years if he had seen it he shook his head in emphatic denial: 'You cannot see that,' he said, 'till you have a long beard and grey hair on your head.'

On the banks of the King River the Goddess made the 773
first aboriginal canoe from a sheet of bark. She sewed the ends together with pandanus palm fronds and caulked them with bloodwood gum. Prominent rocks indicate where she crossed the river, and as there are good food-areas near by, [361]
the place is a favoured camp. For many moons the Goddess camped by the river, and as her children were born, she sent them out to their appointed territories between the King and Liverpool Rivers. She said: 'I have not left many children in the west, so I will leave them here.' No one [161]
doubts that this accounts for the large local population.

To the north of Guion Point, Numma Moiyuk scooped out the largest food-swamp in the west. It is near the beach, and its acres of rushes produce incredible quantities of corms. [222]

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773 Scores of women annually turn over the mud in search for
222 the nutty bulbs; ducks, geese, ibis, and native companions breed there and live on the corms, for Numma Moiyuk distributed bird-life with a lavish hand. Some of the best of the food-country lies between the two rivers, and hordes of a hundred members thrive on the swamp food, birds,
[262] and fresh-water fish, with a supplementing diet of yams, wild honey, and animals.

776 A popular though poisonous yam was planted in this
824 district, and today certain ceremonies must be performed
[779] to control its tabu and protect the horde from its powers.
[776] Ambij controls yam magic and contrives the death of any men who neglect being initiated into the totemic secrets.
881 Three youths, averaging about fifteen years, were being
779 prepared on Goulburn Island for the ceremony, and for days the old men camped away in the scrub, making the yam
[778] totem from a solid log about five feet long and six inches in
[531] diameter. With painstaking care they smeared it with drawings in coloured clays and charcoal. On the appointed
[785] day, the youths fasted in silence, totemic symbols were
[302] painted on their chests, and later they were blindfolded and led to the ceremonial ground. The totem was in a bush shelter, and as the boys approached it they were told to listen for the voice of Ambij. An increasing roar came from the booth, as two old men swung their 'bull-roarers' or flat,
[534] paddle-shaped laths attached to string. By the time the initiates were inside the hut, the noise had subsided and in a loud aggressive voice an old man told them of Ambij and of the misfortune that would overtake them if they failed to respect him and observe the tabus of his yam. By way of
[789] an antidote, one old man caressingly laid his hands on the totem, rubbed them under his armpits to collect the moist strength of his body and anointed the eyes of the youths. Only then was it considered safe for them to look at the totem, but by this time the initiates were thoroughly awed,

and after a quick glance at the totem they kept their eyes 881
on the ground. Eventually they were induced to touch the 779
totem, after which the whole party filed back to the main camp for food, and indulged in the usual singing and dancing.

With her journey's end in sight, Numma Moiyuk crossed 773
the Liverpool River and camped behind Boucaut Bay. On a wide plain she made a lagoon and filled it with water-lilies and fish. Her remaining offspring were born beside the lake and she taught them all she knew. These children raised up distinct hordes, but they all camped with the Goddess by the lake. They ingeniously account for a number
of their dances and songs, and for certain arts and crafts, [184]
which are unknown elsewhere in the west, by saying that [171]
they were special gifts from Numma Moiyuk. Thus they effectively forestall any pagan suggestion that such customs may have come from the adjacent, eastern 'foreign' group where, strange to relate, they are in everyday use.

For many years the aged Goddess stayed with the Boucaut Bay hordes, and through her they became mighty warriors and hunters. But they became so dependent on her, that when she died they not only lost a leader but were in danger of a severe reduction in strength and prestige. Finally they decided to retain her strength and skill by absorbing her body; so they cooked and ate her.

To this day the ceremonial practice is continued, and all [266]
but the diseased and aged are eaten. In the same way as 776
Numma Moiyuk's spirit returned to the spirit world under 775
the tide-rip at Cape Don, all aboriginal spirits return to
Numma Moiyuk; and the singing and wailing accompanying [764]
a burial are prayers to the goddess to receive and care for the departed. Numma Moiyuk watches over the affairs of men
and sends out young spirits to populate the land. Sexual [842]
intercourse itself does not result in conception, but is an appeal to the Mother of creation to send a young spirit from

775 776 842 the spirit world. Numma Moiyuk watches for her opportunity, and when a prospective mother goes for water, she slips the spirit of the child into the pool and the potential parent unwittingly drinks it. The child is later born in the usual way, a week, a month, or possibly several years later, for time is immaterial when spiritual beings operate in the natural world.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Stone Age Religion

IT IS OFTEN asked if aboriginals are religious and if there is 771
an aboriginal religion. That 'man is a religious animal' and
that he is 'incurably religious' are theories that have been
widely accepted. Nevertheless it is surprising to discover the
extent of aboriginal religious beliefs. Their beliefs are
primitive, yet they include the early forms of most well-known religions, and cover to an astonishing degree much
of the content in fundamental religion. Religion may be
defined in many terms, but a score or more of these widely
varying definitions cover the indefinite scope of aboriginal
beliefs. Aboriginal religion is one of 'beginnings', and the
sum total of his beliefs resolves itself into a deep well of proto-religion in which is found fetishism, tabu, magic, awe, fear,
totemism, and prayer to departed human spirits.

Fetishism includes the belief that supernatural powers 778
may be harnessed by wearing a charm of hair, skin, blood, 765
or bone taken from the body of a dead man.[1] Wandering 776
spirits are feared, the world is full of them and unexplained
happenings are attributed to them.[2]

Tabus are carefully observed and ceremonial abstinence 784
is dependent on the fear of definite consequences[3] whilst,
because of its negative reaction, Stone Age men refrain from
doing certain things for fear of the evil that will come upon [262]
them, as when women abstain from eating men's food and [841]
from hunting their game during menstruation.[4]

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[1] Chapter 5, 'Jungle Lore and Etiquette.'
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Chapter 6, 'From Hand to Mouth.'
[4] Chapter 5, 'Jungle Lore and Etiquette.'

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789 Magic profoundly influences everyday beliefs and habits, and an ordinary nomad, as well as the witch-doctor, may set in operation magical powers.[1]

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[775]
[755] Prayer is offered to the spirits of the dead, and they are not only called on to receive departing human spirits, but in time of sickness, a man will call on the waterspout to carry his prayer to the spirits of his relatives.[2] A patient may also enter a totemic waterhole inhabited by a great mythical snake, which will effect the faith-cure.[3] Mythical serpents are called on for help, and receive prayers in time of acute danger and distress.

782
771 Makarola told me that he had been overtaken by darkness when returning with his family after a day's fishing. A strong wind arose and the canoe was blown out to sea, waves half-filled it, and whilst wives and children baled frantically in the darkness, he toiled to keep the dug-out into the wind. Makarola then remembered his totem and called on it for help. He said that in that instant he saw a 'bright light' which 'filled' his head. By the light he was assured that they would be brought safely to land, and when the wind abated, the family landed in an exhausted condition.

779 Though awe and fear weigh heavily in aboriginal religion, the nomad's religious outlook and practices are best summed up under the term 'Totemism'. Such totemism links man and nature and goes back to the ancestral creators of Junkgowa, who made the earth and its inhabitants, instituted present-day laws, habits and customs, and defined for all time the nomad's outlook and beliefs. Totemic beliefs and the record of their bestowal are preserved in the [796] Ngara ceremonies, which are linked with the totem centres where the hero-Ancestors performed their mighty deeds. 775 Behind the supernatural Ancestors, and beyond the present world, is the spirit-land of Buralkor, from whence they came.

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[1] Chapter 13, 'Black Magic.'
[2] Chapter 10, 'Medicine-Man and Magic.'
[3] Ibid.

Buralkor is also inhabited by the sun and her child, and by 775
departed human spirits and Wangarr.

Wangarr is the eternal, indefinite, impersonal power 776
behind creation and all life. He is impersonal, yet benign.
He sent the Junkgowa to the earth, and through their
totem centres he is now in touch with men. Being
impersonal, there is no suggestion of his being placated, and
eventually both the evil and the good go to Buralkor to dwell [775]
with him in the spirit-land.

Unusual happenings are glibly attributed to Wangarr, and 779
his name is constantly on the lips of nomads. To Maulin and
his horde, the entire headland and the islands off Port
Bradshaw had always been a totem centre, for here the
ancestral Junkgowa had performed their miracles; the
application of the vague 'Wangarr' to any part of the area
indicates that it is linked to the spirit-world. Maulin and his
sons visited their totem centre near Port Bradshaw shortly
after a cyclonic disturbance, and on a reef near an island
they saw a new rock that had been thrown up in the storm.
No such simple explanation came to their minds, however,
for Maulin casually remarked, 'Oh, Wangarr,' and his
explanation satisfied everyone. In the course of time a horde
from the south wandered in to fraternize and to bring news
concerning a raid that had taken place below Blue Mud
Bay, in which a woman and her child had been killed.
'Yes,' Maulin nonchalantly remarked, 'we knew something
untoward had happened, because we saw a new rock
standing on the reef and realized that Wangarr had something to
do with it. It must have been put there by the spirits of the [775]
woman and her child to show us that they had been killed.'

It is impossible to determine just where lies the line of 776
demarcation between Wangarr and the activities of 775
departed human spirits. Nor is it necessary to make such
distinction, for the term Wangarr includes them all, the
Great Spirit, creative Junkgowa sent forth by him, the

776 power behind totem centres, and human spirits created and
775 received again in Buralkor by him after death.

It soon becomes obvious that to arrive at an understanding
771 of the nomad, and to win his complete confidence, there
773 must be an appreciation of his religion. His religion runs down through his secret life to everyday arts and crafts, which were all given him by the Junkgowa and determines even his methods of food-gathering and cooking. All these things are done in a particular manner, because the Junkgowa so instituted them. In the network of the nomad's life the simplest of activities are linked to his highest beliefs and noblest aspirations. They stand or fall together, and no part of his habits and customs can be tampered with without the risk of doing violence to the entire structure of his life and culture. An effective approach to the nomad can be made only on the basis of religion; that is, by an appreciation of his habits, outlook, and philosophy of life. Be a man trader, adventurer, or missionary, he will find a ready welcome if he is prepared to respect their laws, both common and sacred, which are all interwoven and rest on ancient Junkgowa creation myths.

Several old men were talking together and invited me to
177 join them. One of them said: 'We like those stories of Jesus
797 that you tell us: He is the white man's Junkgowa. Our Junkgowa came from Wangarr and we can see now that, in the same way, Jesus is the white man's Junkgowa.' It was instantly clear that they accepted Jesus as the equal of their Junkgowa—and no more. If such an estimate were accepted it would preclude any development in their outlook, aspiration, and custom. I suggested to these primitive philosophers that many Junkgowa had taught the white man, although they went by the name of 'prophets'. Second, their teachings were incomplete and vague till God the Eternal Spirit, known to aborigines as Wangarr, sent His Son Jesus to complete the revelation. Because of the

teachings of Jesus, much prophetic teaching was superseded; 177
and the Christian Church, or tribe, nominally follows only 797
the way of Jesus.

A parallel was then applied to aboriginal Junkgowa, for the old men agreed that some of their ancient habits based on the Junkgowa were not all that they could be; their acceptance of feuds, tribal-killings, and infanticide. All that is good in aboriginal law (and much of it is good and noble as far as it goes) can thus be completed by Jesus, who came from Wangarr, not only to teach white men, but aborigines as well.

An obvious weakness in this approach is the nomad's indefinite conception of Wangarr, but there is also great value in the term, in that it is familiar and scarcely less vague to the aboriginal mind than the primitive Hebrew conception of the 'Eternal', as found in the early pages of the Bible. Similarly, Wangarr can be filled with Jesus' conception of 'God the Father' without doing damage to aboriginal culture. No cleavage becomes apparent, except that killings, due to ignorance and superstition, are disappearing, and new life and vigour are infusing their ancient but stagnant nature-religion. A new racial vigour arising from applied Christianity, and including all that is best in modern civilization, is affecting nomadic economic life, so that the change from nomads to agriculturists has already begun, a simple monetary system has been introduced to replace barter, the standard of life and living conditions are improving as nomads apply their knowledge of arts and crafts to new remunerative industries, and regular education in the schools is profoundly and advantageously affecting a strictly aboriginal culture in the rising generation.

One of the Yulengor toiling with me on the rocky Yirrkala headland voiced the question in every mind: 'Bapa, why are we digging this hole?'

'So as to erect a maraian' (sacred totem) 'in it.'

177 Incredulously the men paused from their digging:
797 'Maraian? But if we put it here on the headland, the women and children will see it.'

'Yes. This is the Jesus-Totem; it is the biggest Totem of all. Everyone can look at it because Jesus is the Saviour or "Ancestor" of women and children as well as of men. When we look at it we think of Him; we call it His Cross.'

Wondering greatly they returned to their work. For five years these men had heard the Christian gospel of peace and good-will, and to some extent had grasped its sublime bearing on their ageless feuds, tribal-killings, and fears. It was now felt that the use of this symbol would bring implications of the Gospel more realistically to their minds. So a tall swamp-tree was hand-squared into a Cross about forty feet high, dragged through the jungle and raised on the Yirrkala headland. Towering over native camps and all the mission, it is visible for several miles; all who make their way to Yirrkala by bush-track or canoe realize that they are coming to the 'Cross-wanga' or Cross-camp. With a visible Cross on the headland it was easier to talk about it to a people whose minds were steeped in symbolism, who live in the past, and whose history, beliefs, and myths are linked to visible totem centres.

A young American airman pursued attacking bombers far out over the Arafua Sea, till lack of petrol forced him to turn back. When some miles off-shore, his petrol gave out, and he was forced to parachute into the sea. He was washed ashore unconscious on Bremer Island. In the early morning the airman was literally stabbed into consciousness, and found two naked nomads standing over him with a spear held determinedly to his ribs.

'You Jap?' they asked in broken English.

'My God!' gasped the airman, 'no, I'm American.'

He said later that the nomads 'jabbered' together, undecided what to do, for neither of them had heard of

Americans nor understood his accent. Their looks were 177
menacing, till one Yulengor saw a miniature Cross round 797
the airman's neck; whereupon, with unmistakable friendliness, he dropped his spear, and pointing to the Cross said: 'Jesus! This number-one man.' That was enough for them; the pilot was helped to his feet, given water and food and made to realize that he was among friends.

From Bremer Island it is twelve miles by sea to Yirrkala, but the trip is a slow one by canoe, so the Yulengor crossed to the mainland and guided and sometimes carried the airman through the bush to the mission. From the top of the highest hill on the track they tried to point out the mission station, but all he could see on the rugged headland, towering above what otherwise might have been inhospitable jungle, was a broad white Cross.

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/Information on Murngin mythology will be found in category 116, pp. 128-156/.